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Making Sense of Performance Pay: Sensemaking and Sensegiving in Teachers' Implementation of Compensation Reform

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Making Sense of Performance Pay: Sensemaking and Sensegiving in Teachers' Implementation of Compensation Reform

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

December 2010

Acknowledgements

It would not be an overstatement or melodrama to characterize this document as the culmination of a long and tumultuous journey. Along the way, many people have supported and contributed to this work in numerous indispensable ways.

First and foremost, I'd like to thank my respondents in Hill Independent School District for their time, assistance, and candor. They gave me many great insights into the policy process and made this research a pleasure to conduct. The administrative staff at Hill ISD who approved and oversaw my work there were also extremely helpful, as were the faculty and staff at the UT Austin Office of Research Support. Hortensia Palomares and Martha Ovando in the Department of Educational Administration were also invaluable sources of information and guidance at every step along the way.

Second, I want to express my gratitude to my wonderful dissertation committee for their tremendous guidance and assistance. My chair, Jennifer Holme, was instrumental in producing this work. Her high standards, keen insights, and patience made this work much better than it would have been without her involvement. I am indebted to Michelle Young for contributing to the study's design in ways that made it more interesting and relevant. Matt Springer provided me with insight into performance pay policies and research, and ensured rigor in my analysis and reporting. He was also a helpful colleague and mentor before, during, and after my research. Pedro Reyes and Uri Treisman supported and counseled me throughout the process of developing this work. Their mentoring and advice were invaluable. I also want to thank Ed Fuller for providing

me with his knowledge of Hill ISD's performance pay program, and for his valuable insights into the district and issues of teacher quality.

Aside from these direct contributors, many people along the way shaped my thinking about teacher quality and policy implementation. Without their influence, I could never have formulated this research design or conducted my analysis. My interest in policy implementation began with my work with Tom Hatch on schools' capacity for improvement. His mentoring and generosity helped me to develop ideas that provided the seeds for this research. I'm also indebted to Jennifer Chatman, John Freeman, Bruce Fuller, and Judith Warren Little for exposing me to the organizational and institutional theories that guided my work. Finally, I want to thank Linda Anderson, Ron Kettler, and Christi Martin for bringing me into the field of teacher quality policies that spurred my questions and research.

On a personal note, I am thankful beyond words to my wonderful family and friends who were supportive, patient, and loving throughout this journey. Everyone in my life encouraged me along the way, but a few people merit special acknowledgement. My study group partners, Lisa Goodnow and Madlene Hamilton, gave me advice, friendship, and shoulders to lean on as I developed and conducted my research. My childhood friends Becky Buchanan, Tracy Mellody, and Dawn Wilks made me laugh and waited patiently for me on our beach vacation as I wrote my last chapter. My parents assisted me financially, babysat my children on countless occasions while I wrote, and gave me unwavering love and support. They were my biggest champions, and I am forever

indebted to them. My daughters, Peyton and Claire, always encouraged me and waited patiently for “Dr. Mommy” to finish her work. They were a constant source of joy and inspiration throughout this process. Last, but far from least, I am eternally grateful to my amazing husband, Steve, for his unlimited and unconditional patience, empathy, advice, love, and comic relief at the right moments. He was always there for me and I truly could never have done this without him.

Making Sense of Performance Pay: Sensemaking and Sensegiving in Teachers' Implementation of Compensation Reform

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

Supervisor: Jennifer Jellison Holme

Teacher compensation reforms have been on the rise in recent years, yet research has yet to fully demonstrate how teachers interpret these policies and how they may influence their instructional practices and professional decisions. This qualitative study of a performance pay program in an urban district in Texas drew on cognitive approaches to policy implementation and theories of sensemaking to examine and explicate these issues. Teachers' experiences in two schools were examined through interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. The experiences of school principals and district policymakers acting as sensegivers to teachers about the program's goals, purposes, and theory of action were also examined. District policymakers' understandings of the program varied, and were informed by their positions in the system and their own interests in the program. These differences resulted in a complex program with an array of objectives for teachers to implement in schools and classrooms, as well as varying expectations for teachers' work, which were not always understood by teachers. With few clear and consistent messages from policymakers, teachers and principals interpreted the

program according to their own ideas about important outcomes, and then shaped it to fit their situations. Although accepting of the program, teachers and principals were not always able to focus on it in ways expected by policymakers given other demands on them, particularly those emanating from the accountability system. Some evidence of goal distortion in terms of teachers' attention to student assignments and mobility was also found. These findings hold implications for cognitive theories of policy implementation, suggesting that teachers' responses to policies are influenced by the amount of attention they are able to give them, as well as direct sensegiving about policy goals and expectations on the part of policymakers. The findings also suggest that performance pay programs can be expected to be adapted, co-opted, and selectively attended to in order to fit within the contexts in which they are implemented. Thus, policymakers should consider other demands in the policy environment that may compete with performance incentives, as well as the organizational contexts of schools in which they will be implemented.

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Chapter 1: Purpose and Rationale

Increasingly, districts and states are experimenting with performance-based compensation policies intended to shift the basis of teacher compensation from experience and credentials to performance. Nationally, approximately 10 percent of school districts and 20 percent of K-12 public school teachers in 32 states are working with performance-based compensation programs (Guthrie & Schuermann, 2008). Texas, Florida, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Tennessee have enacted statewide programs to implement performance pay for educators. Numerous school districts, including Denver Public Schools, Houston Independent School District, Dallas Independent School District, and New York City Public Schools are currently engaged in or are developing performance-based compensation programs. The Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), a prominent teacher improvement model incorporating performance-based compensation, is now being implemented in 49 districts and charter schools employing more than 7,500 teachers.[1] Three states, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Texas, have created statewide TAP initiatives.

More educators can be expected to become involved with compensation reform, as new programs and funding continue to expand. Most recently, 62 school districts, nonprofits, and state education agencies were recently awarded $1.2 billion over five years as part of the federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) program. The U.S. Department of Education also issued guidelines allowing states and districts to spend funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act on innovative compensation programs.

Further, proposals to tie teacher evaluations and compensation to student performance are a key feature of the $4.35 billion federal Race to the Top grant competition. Apart from these federal initiatives, several school districts and states have created performance pay programs of their own. District of Columbia Public Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee recently captured headlines nationwide with a plan to pay teachers up to $150,000 per year through performance-based compensation (funded in part by private foundation grants) in exchange for elimination of some seniority protections (Sawchuck, 2010). With the profile of compensation reform on the rise and increased funding for programs available, more districts can be expected to implement performance pay programs.

In order to determine the efficacy of performance pay in creating sustainable improvements in teacher quality and student learning, policymakers need to understand how teachers are responding to these initiatives. While a great deal of attention has been paid to teachers' acceptance of performance pay and its potential impact on student achievement, less emphasis has been placed in research on the ways performance incentives are being integrated into teachers' decisions about instructional practice and career plans. Yet this knowledge is vital to understanding the sustainability of performance pay and its capacity to induce lasting improvements in student outcomes.

This purpose of this research was to examine these issues. In this chapter, I discuss the context of performance-based compensation in education and its theory of action in producing improvements in student learning. I argue that although models of performance incentives are fairly straightforward, their enactment is actually quite

complex. This study was aimed at unpacking some of those complexities, namely the way teachers interpret and make meaning of performance pay and how their interactions with policymakers influence those interpretations.

Performance-Based Compensation in Education

It is widely accepted today that teachers are a key determinant of student success. Students' academic performance depends to a great degree on the teachers they are assigned. Moreover, these differences are cumulative. Students who are consistently assigned to effective teachers perform better over time than students assigned to ineffective teachers or than students assigned to teachers of varying effectiveness (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Some research has estimated that the effect of being assigned to effective teachers over consecutive years can be sufficient to close entirely the average achievement gap between low and middle income students (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2001).

Unfortunately, recruiting and retaining effective teachers is a challenge for many school districts with large numbers of struggling students. According to various estimates, between one-quarter and one-third of beginning teachers leave the field within four years (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Rowan, Correnti, & Richard, 2002). The problem is even more pronounced in schools with high concentrations of students living in poverty, which also tend to be low-performing. Teachers who transfer to other schools tend to leave high-minority schools in favor of schools with fewer minority students (Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005). Teachers also tend to transfer from low-performing

schools to better performing schools (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). Ingersoll (2001) found that annually, approximately 16% of teachers leave their schools, and that attrition rates in high-poverty schools are fully 50% higher than in low-poverty schools.

Such findings have led to numerous efforts, from reforms of teacher preparation to development of mentoring and induction programs for new teachers, to improve the quality of teachers while also attracting them to high-needs schools. As a result, districts and school administrators have begun to face pressures to reform their human resource practices to recruit and retain more effective teachers. The No Child Left Behind Act, which defines highly qualified teachers and makes student achievement a central focus of education policy, has also stimulated interest in performance-based measures of school and teacher effectiveness (Podgursky & Springer, 2007). Adding to this interest are sophisticated statistical techniques that provide quantifiable measures of teachers' contributions to student test scores (McCaffrey, Han, & Lockwood, 2009).

Performance-based compensation in education is not new, however. Teachers in Great Britain were paid on the basis of performance in the eighteenth century. In the U.S., districts have experimented since the early twentieth century with alternatives to single salary schedules based on experience and credentials (Texas Education Agency, 1998; Wilms & Chapleau, 1999). With the release of the *A Nation at Risk* report in 1983, which highlighted teacher quality as a factor in the relatively poor performance of U.S. students, states and public school districts began to consider in greater numbers replacing or

supplementing single salary schedules with differentiated pay based on performance (Podgursky & Springer, 2007).

These alternatives have included merit pay plans that provide bonuses or salary increases to high-performing teachers and career ladder systems that offer both increased compensation and advancement opportunities for professional development, attainment of credentials, and performance. For the most part, these programs have been short-lived, failing because of inadequate performance measures, insufficient funding, and political opposition from teachers' unions and associations. Texas, for example, instituted a career ladder program in 1984 that created a system by which teachers' pay would be increased based on appraisals of classroom, satisfaction of professional development requirements, and experience. By 1993, the system was abolished amidst dissatisfaction among teachers who questioned the impartiality of the appraisal system and among administrators who were often unable to distribute earned bonuses and supplements due to inadequate state and local funding (Davis, 2004; Texas Education Agency, 1998).

School-based performance award (SBPA), or cooperative incentive plans, which provide bonuses to teachers and administrators for attainment of school-wide achievement objectives, have been more enduring. These programs began in earnest in the 1990s, as state accountability systems were being established. Texas and Kentucky, for example, began providing financial awards to schools achieving high ratings at the inception of their accountability systems in 1990 and 1993, respectively. These awards are often provided to schools, which may or may not distribute them as bonuses to

teachers and other staff. Districts are more likely to establish programs that explicitly provide individual bonuses to teachers based on school performance (Raham, 2000). SBPA programs remain an important part of many states' accountability systems, as well as federal accountability programs established by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Unlike these past efforts, the new generation of performance pay plans are multifaceted programs designed to address teacher compensation more comprehensively (Heneman & Kimball, 2008). Instead of focusing on attainment of credentials or appraisals, or on school performance goals alone, they integrate a variety of performance awards with recruitment and retention bonuses, and incorporate professional development and mentoring to improve knowledge and skills. TAP, developed by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (established by the Milken Family Foundation), was one of the first programs of this type. Launched in 1999, it incorporates multiple career paths for teachers, continuous professional development, standards-based teacher evaluations, and performance pay. Schools implement TAP much as they would a comprehensive school reform program, as a whole-school effort.

Denver Public Schools' ProComp plan, implemented districtwide in 2005, is another prominent program that has attracted much attention. Like TAP, it provides awards for participation in professional development and attainment of credentials as well as awards for school- and classroom-level student achievement. ProComp, however, is a district program that affects all teachers hired since the 2005-2006 school year, as well as teachers already working in the district who opt in. Texas's statewide District

Awards for Teaching Excellence (DATE) program similarly provides awards for achieving student achievement goals and engaging in collaborative professional activities along with bonuses for teaching hard-to-staff subjects in hard-to-staff schools. These comprehensive compensation programs have spurred larger efforts to alter school and district human resource practices to better integrate recruitment, placement, retention, development, and compensation, focusing more on student outcomes and less on experience and credentials (Milanowski, 2008b).

Performance Pay and Policy Implementation

The theory of action underlying performance pay is relatively straightforward, yet the policy is employed to achieve varied and complex goals. A theory of action specifies and explains the assumed, hypothesized, or demonstrated causal connections between policy inputs that lead to desired outcomes (Patton, 2002). In the case of performance pay, teachers are provided bonuses and/or salary increases based on their attainment of specified performance goals. These monetary rewards are intended to directly increase teachers' motivation to achieve desired student learning goals in their own classrooms, which should lead to overall improvement in student achievement. Performance incentives are further intended to attract high-quality teachers to schools and subject areas in which positions are often difficult to fill through the promise of higher pay and direct acknowledgements of performance. Scholars also point to the potential of performance-based compensation to improve the overall quality of individuals entering teaching and to

drive low-performing teachers out of the profession (Koppich, 2008; Podgursky & Springer, 2007).

At heart, performance-based compensation is an economic approach that attempts to alter individual decision makers' preferences by manipulating the resources available to them. Specifically, monetary incentives are introduced to alter teachers' decisions about where to work, what types of professional activities to undertake, and which instructional goals to pursue. As with other types of policies that employ such incentives to realign goals, such as accountability systems or school reconstitution, this model presents difficulties in implementation (Malen, Croninger, Muncey, & Redmond-Jones, 2002). Teachers base decisions about their workplaces on a variety of factors, including the socioeconomic status of students, working conditions in schools, and proximity to their hometowns (Loeb & McEwan, 2006). Accountability systems are rife with opportunities to game the system by complying (or cheating) without genuinely altering practices or goals (Loeb & McEwan, 2006; Rothstein, 2009). Incomplete knowledge of teacher effectiveness, school effectiveness, and instructional improvement among teachers, administrators, and policymakers can also hinder the ability of incentive-based policies to achieve their objectives (Loeb & McEwan, 2006).

Given these complexities, implementation research that closely examines teachers' responses to and interpretations of incentives is critical to understanding the potential of performance-based compensation policies to induce and sustain improvements in student learning. Policy implementation is a highly localized endeavor

that can determine policy success or failure (Berends, Bodilly, & Kirby, 2005; McLaughlin, 1987). Studies that examine the ways in which teachers make sense of education policies in the context of their school environments can illuminate the ways in which they are integrated into existing practices and decisions (Coburn, 2001a).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine and explicate the ways in which teachers make sense of performance-based compensation. Specifically, I examined the meanings and understandings they create about the goals and intentions of these policies, and how their professional decisions are being influenced by performance pay. These areas fit well with the theory of action of performance pay as primarily a lever for changing goals, motivations, and priorities more than altering specific classroom behaviors or practices (Rothstein, 2009).

A second purpose of the study was to understand the relationship between interpretations at the school level and those made by policymakers at the district level. Policymakers constructing definitions and meanings of policies and programs must contend not only with ambiguity and inexperience, but also with conflict between stakeholders and interest groups. They must act as sensegivers, creating their own meanings of policy mechanisms and processes and then communicating them to promote desired behaviors and outcomes (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Their meanings and definitions may or may not align with those of the teachers whose behaviors and attitudes they seek to change. This relationship has been studied in regard to teachers'

interpretations of policy messages – normative, regulative, and cognitive pressures about teaching and learning (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Coburn, 2001a; Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005). The messages themselves, though, have typically been treated as static and their development largely unexamined. However, the conceptual and theoretical assumptions and definitions that underlie policies influence the policy messages received by teachers, but are not always made explicit in the policies themselves.

To understand the interplay between sensemaking and sensegiving, I examined the experiences of teachers, school administrators, and district policymakers in Hill Independent School District, a mid-sized urban school district in Texas. The district had been piloting a comprehensive performance-based compensation program since 2007 (this program is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three). The program was characterized by several features that made it well-suited to an implementation study of performance-based compensation. First, the program was still in a pilot phase and under development. Meanings and interpretations about the policy were actively being negotiated and changed as guidelines and requirements are changes. Second, it was developed and was overseen by a steering committee made up of district, teacher, principal, and community representatives. This presented a unique opportunity to study not only the teachers and school administrators enacting the policy, but also the designers of the policy itself. Few studies have included both sets of actors to more thoroughly examine the policy messages received and interpreted in schools. Third, the program had been developed and implemented in a relatively conflict-free environment. Initiatives in

some other districts (though not all) have been characterized by political controversy that could affect teachers' interpretations of them. Such controversy had been minimal (although not nonexistent) in this district, making it easier to focus on teachers' experiences with the content and effects of the policy itself rather than with the political conflicts surrounding it.

Research Design and Chapter Overview

In examining this program, I drew on theories of policy implementation that emphasize the co-construction of policy implementation and the centrality of sensemaking and interpretation in the enactment of policies in schools and classrooms. The study addressed the following overarching research questions (these questions are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three):

1. What meanings and understandings do teachers construct about the goals, purposes, and intentions of performance-based compensation?
2. How do these meanings and understandings compare with the assumptions and intentions of policymakers who design and communicate performance-based compensation policies?
3. What are the relationships between teachers' experiences with performance-based compensation policy and teachers' goals for their students' learning and their own professional goals?

To address these questions, I used case study methodology, which allows for nuanced exploration of the influence of context and for descriptions of events over time. The main focus of the study was teachers and their sensemaking and implementation of performance pay. To understand their meaning making and how it is influenced, I also

included important sensegivers, namely principals and district policymakers who actively mediate between teachers and the compensation reforms.

In examining the meanings constructed about performance-based compensation by both district policymakers and school practitioners, I found that their interpretations varied in important ways, even as they engaged in similar processes of meaning construction. Teachers interpreted the performance pay program in relation to their existing practices and notions about important outcomes. District policymakers did the same, but because they prioritized and engaged with the program in unique ways, they came to different understandings of its purposes and goals. These goals were not always clearly communicated to teachers, and principals took on key roles in providing frameworks for teachers' actions in implementing program activities in their classrooms.

Despite these differences in interpreting the program, teachers did change their instructional practices in some important ways in response to incentives. Examples of changes identified were focusing more attention on specific content or groups of students, and paying closer attention to curriculum standards. However, these changes appeared difficult to sustain in the face of other demands on teachers, particularly those emanating from the state accountability system.

In the next chapter, I turn to the literature on performance pay, cognitive approaches to policy implementation, and sensemaking that informed my research questions and the design of the study. In Chapter 3, I describe the research design, including samples, data collection methods, and analytic techniques employed. Chapter 4

is focused on the policy context of the performance pay program studied here, which formed the environment in which policymakers in Hill ISD designed and enacted their performance pay program. The program itself is described in the chapter, as well. Chapter 5 through 7 describe the experiences of district policymakers, school administrators, and teachers with Hill ISD's performance pay program, and the meanings they constructed about it. These chapters show that, although these groups developed a variety of understandings of the program, they went about doing so in similar ways. Finally, in Chapter 8, I summarize my findings and discuss their implications for theories of policy implementation, performance pay policies, and research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Performance-based compensation is based on the assumption that individual decisions about where to teach, what professional activities to engage in, and which goals to pursue can be altered or guided by monetary incentives. It is a straightforward model, but one with complex goals. To understand the potential of this policy to create significant and lasting change, we must understand the way it is interpreted, adapted, and integrated within schools and communities of teachers. The aim should be not so much to uncover universal truths about enacting performance-based compensation in real-world settings, but to "build knowledge about what works for whom, where, when, and why," (Honig, 2006b, p. 4).

In this chapter, I first review the current research on performance-based compensation. Most of this research has taken the form of evaluations of programs and emphasizes short-term outcomes on student achievement and teacher mobility. Implementation studies have focused mostly on teacher satisfaction, school climate, and compliance. Examinations of teachers' responses to performance-based compensation and their understanding of it have been limited. Thus, we still know very little about how teachers are interpreting, adapting, and integrating the goals of performance-based compensation into their practices and professional decisions.

To shed some light on this issue, I next review literature on policy implementation, focusing on cognitive theories that are particularly well-suited to examining policies, such as compensation reform, that seek to effect substantial changes

in teachers' behaviors and decisions. Much research within this framework has studied teachers' implementation of curricular reforms, highlighting the centrality of sensemaking processes in their understanding and enactment of policy. To illustrate how cognitive theories of policy implementation can illuminate the processes by which performance pay policies are understood and enacted within schools, I then review studies of teachers' responses to accountability policies that have used this approach. This research suggests that teachers' responses to incentives and pressures are complex and highly influenced by school cultures and teacher communities. Finally, I discuss the implications of the literature for the study proposed here.

Research on Performance-Based Compensation

This review addresses first what is known about the effects of performance pay on student outcomes, and then addresses issues related to policy implementation. The focus here is primarily on "diversified" plans (Heneman & Kimball, 2008) that incorporate an array of performance incentives along with professional development and pay for knowledge and skills. Diversified pay policies have only been implemented in earnest since 2004, when Denver Public Schools' ProComp plan was enacted throughout the district.[2] Thus, the research base is still quite limited. At this point, few conclusions can be made about how performance pay affects important outcomes such as student learning, teacher mobility, and teacher recruitment. Most programs simply have not been in place long enough to make those determinations. More conclusive evidence exists on teachers' attitudes toward performance pay and how it influences their practice. Even so, the

evidence offers sometimes contradictory findings, often leading to more questions than answers.

Effects on Student Outcomes.

At this time, only a handful of performance pay programs have been implemented long enough to demonstrate effects on student achievement. An evaluation of the pilot of the ProComp program showed that effects on student achievement (as measured by changes in mean normal curve equivalents in reading, writing, and mathematics on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Colorado Student Assessment Program) varied by school level and by the rigor and attainment of classroom learning objectives set by individual teachers (Community Training and Assistance Center, 2004). Pilot middle and high school students performed better than peers in control schools on most tests, while pilot elementary students performed below the levels of students in control schools. In all school levels, students of teachers setting more rigorous learning objectives and attaining two objectives had higher mean scores than students whose teachers set less rigorous objectives or did not meet all of their objectives. A later analysis using a value-added model after the program was implemented districtwide in 2006 showed mixed results. Students of teachers who opted into the program outperformed those of non-participating teachers. However, students of teachers required to participate performed below those of non-participating teachers (Wiley, Gaertner, Spindler, & Subert, 2008).

An analysis of gains in mathematics among schools implementing the TAP program showed a modest, but significant effect of the program on mathematics

achievement in elementary schools. The effects on achievement in secondary schools were mixed, possibly because TAP schools at that level were performing better than controls schools before beginning participation in the program (Springer, Ballou, & Peng, 2008). Finally, analyses of student achievement gains in mathematics and reading among schools participating in Texas's Governor's Educator Excellence Grants (GEEG) program produced mixed results depending on model specifications, leading the evaluators to conclude that evidence of effects on student outcomes were inconclusive (Springer, et al., 2009).

It is important to note that most of these findings are from programs that are still in their beginning stages. As with other systemic reform initiatives, such as comprehensive school reform, it may take several years of implementation to realize measurable improvements in student learning (Berends, et al., 2005). Additionally, performance pay programs are often structured in ways that make it difficult to identify relationships between the programs and student outcomes. For example, new teachers in Denver Public Schools have been required to participate in ProComp since 2005, whereas veteran teachers (i.e., those employed in the district prior to 2005) have the option to participate. In that context, Wiley et al.'s (2008) finding that students of teachers opting in outperformed those of teachers required to participate is not surprising. Not only are teachers opting in more experienced, but it is also possible that those veteran teachers who opt in are more likely to achieve performance objectives than those who opt out. The GEEG analysis of student achievement gains was confounded by the program's eligibility

criteria, under which only high-performing, high-poverty schools were selected to participate. These constraints presented tremendous challenges in identifying an appropriate group of schools to which outcomes could be compared (Springer, et al., 2009).

Overall, research on the effects of performance pay on student achievement is still in its infancy. Findings from the few programs that have been in existence for more than a few years suggest that the policy may improve student achievement in some subjects and grade levels. However, a number of analyses have produced mixed or inconclusive findings that suggest that program design and within-program variations in implementation play an important role in effects on student outcomes.

Effects on Teacher Outcomes.

Performance pay programs are expected to improve student achievement not just by directly inducing teachers to pursue achievement goals, but also by reducing teacher attrition and attracting more qualified teachers into the profession (Podgursky & Springer, 2007). Unfortunately, as with research on student outcomes, research on these outcomes is quite limited due to the limited time most performance pay programs have been implemented.

Evaluations of two statewide performance pay programs in Texas estimated teacher mobility rates among participating schools (Springer, et al., 2009; Springer, Podgursky, Lewis, Ehlert, Ghosh-Dastidar, Gronberg, Hamilton, Jansen, Lopez, Stecher, et al., 2008). Turnover rates among teachers participating in the Texas Educator

Excellence Grants (TEEG) program were slightly higher than those of similar non-participating schools. Beginning teachers in schools participating in the first year of the program also had slightly higher turnover than beginning teachers in non-participating schools. No differences were found between participating schools on the basis of specific features of their performance pay plans. The actual distribution of performance awards, however, had a strong impact on turnover. Turnover among teachers who did not receive awards was more than twice that of teachers who received awards. Further, turnover rates decreased as the amount of awards received increased. Teachers receiving awards of $1,000 or less had turnover rates that were not significantly different from turnover rates prior to participation in the program. Awards of $3,000 or more reduced predicted turnover rates (based on school and teacher characteristics) to less than one quarter of the rate estimated based on turnover prior to participating in the program.

Similar results were obtained for the Governor's Educator Excellence Grants (GEEG) program, which employs a nearly identical program design, but applies to a different set of Texas schools. Teachers who did not receive performance awards had higher estimated turnover than those who received awards. Turnover decreased substantially as award amounts increased. In this analysis, however, plan features had an influence on turnover. Teachers in schools with more individualized plans, as measured by the Gini coefficient (a ratio measure of income inequality), had higher than expected teacher turnover, particularly among beginning teachers. These evaluation findings suggest that amounts of performance awards may play a strong role in teacher attrition in

schools participating in performance pay programs. Given that only high-performing (and high-poverty) schools were selected to participate in both TEEG and GEEG, the findings that low award amounts (and lack of awards) resulted in higher turnover rates begs the question of whether performance pay programs could exacerbate attrition problems, depending on how they are designed and implemented. It is important to note that these findings varied by program year, so more analyses are needed before any conclusions can be made. Research that closely examines teachers' experiences with these programs and the contexts in which they are implemented can also help in interpreting these findings.

Implementation of Performance Pay.

A number of program evaluations have examined teachers' attitudes and perceptions about performance pay. From these evaluations, a few consistent findings have emerged. First, beginning teachers tend to be more supportive of performance pay than more experienced teachers (Goldhaber, DeArmond, & DeBurgomaster, 2007; Jacob & Springer, 2008; Springer, Podgursky, Lewis, Ehlert, Ghosh-Dastidar, Gronberg, Hamilton, Jansen, Lopez, Patterson, et al., 2008). Second, teachers who receive performance awards tend to be more satisfied with their performance pay programs than teachers who do not receive awards or do not participate in programs (Springer, et al., 2009; Springer, Podgursky, Lewis, Ehlert, Ghosh-Dastidar, Gronberg, Hamilton, Jansen, Lopez, Stecher, et al., 2008). Third, teachers overall tend to be more supportive of differentiated pay based on subject and school assignments than of pay based on student performance (Farkas, Johnson, Duffet, Moye, & Vine, 2003; Goldhaber, et al., 2007).

Despite the central role of motivation and changes to instructional practice in the theory of action of performance pay, only a handful of studies have examined these issues in depth. Kelley et al. (2000) studied teachers' motivational reactions to SBPA programs using a model of teacher motivation based on expectancy and goal-setting theories. Using survey and interview data, they found that the programs focused teachers on student achievement goals and clarified learning objectives. Performance awards were associated with both desirable outcomes related to goal attainment and learning, and undesirable outcomes related to stress and sanctions for not achieving goals. However, many teachers were skeptical that they could continue to achieve increasing performance standards over time. Teachers also interpreted performance awards in different ways, with some viewing them as a formal recognition of their work and others viewing it as compensation for the purchase of classroom materials. For others, the incentives were irrelevant. The researchers note that program design and context were important factors affecting teachers' motivation. The way incentives are structured and the context in which they are implemented can have greatly affect the way they are interpreted and acted on.

Evaluators of the ProComp pilot also found considerable variation in the way teachers interpreted and responded to performance incentives (Community Training and Assistance Center, 2004). Using interview and focus group data, they found that teachers tended to alter their practices in ways that fit with their existing practices and ideas about teaching and learning. For example, the teachers they studied responded to the requirement to set student learning objectives by dismissing or marginalizing the practice,

by enthusiastically embracing it as a new benefit to their teaching, or by utilizing it as an extension of existing data use practices. In each case, the response fit with teachers' existing norms of practice, philosophies of teaching, and professional identities. Teachers also described the policy as a secondary or potential influence on their teaching practice, not a primary influence or part of their core practice. These findings were used to explain survey data from pilot teachers that they had not changed their instruction in response to ProComp. Teachers were thought to be compartmentalizing the objective-setting activities mandated by ProComp as planning and assessment, which was separate from the teaching activities that made up their core practice.

Some other research has shown similar inconsistencies in changes to teachers' practices in response to performance pay. Another evaluation of ProComp (conducted after the program had been implemented districtwide) found that teachers increased their engagement in professional development aimed at increasing student achievement, although they also felt more pressure and stress related to the program (Wiley, et al., 2008). However, like the pilot teachers, they reported that the program had had little influence on their teaching. Teachers participating in the TEEG program reported similar lack of effects on practice (Springer, Podgursky, Lewis, Ehlert, Ghosh-Dastidar, Gronberg, Hamilton, Jansen, Lopez, Patterson, et al., 2008). At the same time, teachers in both programs reported that their use of practices such as aligning instruction to standards and focusing on student learning goals related to program objectives increased during their participation in the program. Neither of these evaluations included interview data

from teachers that might have illuminated these inconsistent findings, although the findings from the ProComp pilot evaluation provide some insight into possible explanations.

Limitations of Research on Performance Pay.

In all, evidence regarding the effectiveness of performance pay programs in improving student achievement and reducing teacher attrition is limited, but growing. Although this research has been hindered by program designs and implementation features, there is some evidence that performance pay can have a positive influence on these outcomes. A number of conclusions can also be made about the characteristics of teachers who support performance pay and the types of differentiated pay teachers prefer. We know relatively little, though, about how performance pay programs affect teachers' professional decisions or the professional cultures within schools that play an important role in student learning.

Research from the pilot evaluation of ProComp and Kelley et al.'s (2000) study of motivational effects of SBPA programs provides valuable insight into the ways teachers respond to performance incentives and the ways they are integrated into teachers' existing frameworks regarding their teaching practices. However, these insights are focused largely on individual differences among teachers and place school and other contextual influences largely in the background. Evaluations of a number of performance pay programs has demonstrated that there are considerable variations in the way the policy is implemented across schools (Springer, Ballou, et al., 2008; Springer, et al., 2009;

Springer, Podgursky, Lewis, Ehlert, Ghosh-Dastidar, Gronberg, Hamilton, Jansen, Lopez, Patterson, et al., 2008), suggesting that school environments appear to play a central role in shaping teachers' interpretations and enactment of compensation reform.

Performance pay represents not only a change in school-based practices of evaluation and recognition, but also a change in the larger culture of teaching, which has long been characterized by seniority and privacy (Lortie, 1975). To truly understand how this policy might effect changes in teachers' practices and professional identities, we need more research that examines how it is received, adapted, and integrated into the complex array of influences on teachers, particularly those emanating from school and professional cultures.

In the next section, I argue that implementation research based on cognitive and organizational frameworks can provide this kind of insight. I first provide a brief review of policy implementation research in education, focusing on research employing cognitive and sensemaking perspectives. The sensemaking framework is useful here in examining the way people respond to changes in their environments. I then review research on teachers' implementation of accountability and curriculum policies that uses sensemaking frameworks as an example of how such research can inform us about implementation of performance pay.

Policy Implementation Studies in Education

Numerous studies of education policy initiatives have demonstrated that poor implementation is a contributor to reform failure, but is also a key factor when reforms

are successful (Berends, et al., 2005; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Cohen & Ball, 1990; Corcoran & Christman, 2002; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2006). Sustainable improvement occurs when individuals and organizations integrate new practices and ideas such that they change other aspects of the organization and individuals within them (Coburn, 2003; Elmore, 1996). This has long been the vision of standards-based reforms and other reforms that have arisen from them (such as comprehensive school reform and data-driven decision making). However, policies are frequently implemented in ways that look very different from the intentions of policymakers, impeding reform and contributing to the seemingly endless churn of reform movements in education (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Policy implementation researchers have used different theoretical frameworks to explain the disconnect often found between policy design and the practical realization of policy. Traditional perspectives employ a technical-rational perspective drawn from economics and political science that emphasizes rational choice and principal-agent relationships (Amanda Datnow, 2006; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). These perspectives assume that failures to implement policy according to its design and intent are the result of limited capacity, willful noncompliance, or confusion among policy implementers. Within this framework, these problems can be addressed by reducing policy ambiguity, clarifying lines of authority and institutional structures to simplify relations between policymakers and implementers, or providing clear instructions to

implementers to ensure they properly understand policy mechanisms and intentions (Honig, 2006b).

Technical-rational implementation researchers commonly define and measure implementation as fidelity, the extent to which a policy is delivered to the intended recipients in the manner intended by policy designers (O'Donnell, 2008). Measures of implementation fidelity are designed to provide information about whether the policy "works" by controlling variation in the "treatment," as is done in randomized controlled experiments.[3] While such measures can provide valuable quantitative information about the effects of policies on important outcomes such as student achievement and teacher retention, they do not adequately account for the complexity of implementing policies designed to bring about fundamental changes in teaching practice or educational systems (Spillane, et al., 2002).

Teachers and school administrators implementing reforms must reconcile them with existing ideas within their communities about such matters as what students should learn, how they should be taught, and why they are being educated (Hatch, 2001). As a result, practitioners may continue to harbor philosophies and attitudes that run counter to those undergirding reforms (Booher-Jennings, 2005). School norms and professional traditions can also impede adoption of new practices promoted in policy (Berends, et al., 2005; Ingram, Louis, & Schroeder, 2004; Little, 1995). In the case of compensation reforms, potential conflicts such as these are myriad. They must be reconciled not only

with existing school-wide norms and practices, but also with political values emanating from longstanding professional traditions (DeArmond & Goldhaber, 2008).

Researchers drawing on sociological perspectives make these complexities central to their examinations of the processes by which policies are carried out in schools and classrooms. This line of implementation research emphasizes the cultural contexts in which policies are implemented (Datnow, 2006; Spillane, et al., 2002). Using this lens, variations in implementation are the result of adaptations of policies made by implementers to fit them into their existing practices (McLaughlin, 1976). As such, variations are not necessarily "failures" of implementation or problems to be corrected, but reasonable and expected responses to the institutional and organizational pressures placed on schools (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Further, adaptation of policy is desirable to the extent it enables policies to be integrated into existing practices and cultures (McLaughlin, 1976).

Much cultural implementation research is limited to descriptions of differences between policy intent and its implementation by teachers and administrators inside schools, implying that such variations can be ameliorated through more coherent policy designs and capacity-building initiatives (Elmore, 1996; Massell, 1998). However, policies such as compensation reform that are designed to result in significant changes in systems and practice often require implementers (especially teachers) to make fundamental changes in their work. Cultural implementation research illustrates that such changes are extremely difficult to achieve broadly because they require changes in not

only behaviors, but also beliefs, values, and goals (Spillane, et al., 2002). Thus, the way teachers make sense of policies must be understood in order to understand why policies evolve as they do in implementation.

Cognitive Approaches to Policy Implementation.

Recent researchers have come to view policy implementation as primarily a process of learning and sensemaking involving ongoing negotiations of meaning (Spillane, et al., 2002). These approaches can be useful to research on performance pay by illuminating how teachers come to understand policies, the understandings they construct about them, and the way those understandings affect their behaviors (Spillane, et al., 2002).

This line of research has taken both individualistic and social perspectives on learning. Scholars drawing on social psychological theories, for example, describe how implementation of complex policies essentially involves restructuring schemas developed through prior experiences and existing knowledge (Coburn, 2004; Spillane, 2000). These scholars point to the difficulty of restructuring existing schemas because of the tendency of individuals to focus on superficial aspects of policies and to overlook differences between the core principles of them and their own working theories and knowledge (Cohen, 1990; Spillane, Reiser, & Gomez, 2006). Thus, even extensive knowledge of a policy can still result in different interpretations among individuals, along with varying levels and forms of implementation.

Other research has taken microsociological and situated cognition perspectives, pointing to interactions within social settings as mechanisms for crafting shared understandings of policies. Macro settings such as social class, racial groups, institutional contexts, and professional fields are influential social structures in which individuals develop worldviews that act as filters through which new events, such as policies, are interpreted and experienced (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Dumas & Anyon, 2006; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Especially important, though, are the immediate environments of schools in which implementers interact with one another and draw on existing collective knowledge and social norms to determine the meaning of policy and decide on courses of action (Coburn, 2001a; Spillane, et al., 2002).

In studies of teachers' implementation of policy, professional communities have emerged as important sites for these interactions (Coburn, 2001a; Little, 2003; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996). A teacher professional community refers to any grouping in which teachers learn from one another, model practices that support student learning, and share expertise (Bransford, Derry, Berliner, Hammerness, & Beckett, 2005). Researchers distinguish professional communities from other forms of school culture through the presence of five elements: shared values, focus on student learning, collaboration, deprivatized practice (practice that is shared and open to critique and reflection), and reflective dialogue (Louis & Marks, 1997).

Through these activities and interactions, teachers are able to collectively negotiate meaning about policies and initiatives. The process of developing shared values

about teaching and learning provides teachers with a common language about instruction and set of standards and goals by which to evaluate their effectiveness and identify ways to better address student needs (Louis & Marks, 1997). Teachers also articulate tacit beliefs in the context of professional communities, which enables those beliefs to be examined and challenged (Richardson & Placier, 2001). Through this process, professional communities create representations of policies based on their shared knowledge, prior experiences, and cultural norms. Lesson plans, assessments, curriculum documents, and other tools become the basis for instructional practices and activities that prompt further negotiation, reification, and participation. This ongoing process comes to constitute learning, which gradually transforms practice across the professional community (Coburn & Stein, 2006).

Datnow (2006) has expanded on these theories of meaning making in policy implementation by arguing that policies are not interpreted solely within the schools and professional communities where they are implemented. They are interpreted by groups and individuals throughout the system. Districts and states are not merely contextual backdrops to teachers' sensemaking and enactment of policy. They interact with schools and professional communities to "co-construct" policy through the same types of sensemaking processes teachers undertake in schools and classrooms. The relationships between levels within educational systems, rather than being "top-down" or "bottom-up" are, instead, multidirectional, with actions and messages coming from one level influencing those at another at different points in time. This systemic view of

implementation and policy construction suggests that understanding how policies are interpreted and acted upon necessitates examining how individuals and groups at multiple levels in the system make sense of them.

These approaches to policy implementation can provide insight into teachers' understanding and enactment of performance pay policies. To be used to their greatest effect, though, it is necessary to better understand the mechanisms through which teachers interpret and construct meanings about policies. To elaborate on this, I turn now to theories of sensemaking. Many properties of sensemaking overlap with theories in social and cognitive psychology that have informed cognitive approaches to the study of policy implementation. It is, though, a microsociological theory that is concerned with meaning construction that happens through social interactions in groups. To those concerned mostly with the actions of groups and communities, as are most researchers of educational policy implementation, sensemaking provides a useful framework for understanding the influence of organizational cultures and group dynamics on policy interpretation and adaptation (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005).

Sensemaking.

Theories of sensemaking are derived from the microsociological traditions of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, which emphasize the role of social interactions in the interpretation of events and the creation of social environments (Weick, 1995). It has been most developed and widely used in the field of organizational behavior, where it refers to "…the ongoing, retrospective development of plausible

images that rationalize what people are doing." (Weick, et al., 2005, p. 409). Sensemaking comes into play when people encounter disruptions to their worlds – events that deviate from the normal order of things, people who challenge their preconceived notions, or actions that are unexpected or unusual. When people experience these kinds of interruptions to the norm, they seek to explain them using their preexisting frames of knowledge, or worldviews. When confronted with a new policy initiative, teachers use their prior knowledge and experiences, and cues from their environments to interpret and develop responses to it. They may develop coherent understandings that facilitate actions or focus on inconsistencies in the policy that hinder responses (Coburn, 2001a; Louis, et al., 2005).

Sensemaking involves more than just explaining unexpected events or interruptions. It is a cycle of creating experiences and environments by such activities as identifying the specific problems within problematic situations and identifying cues to be attended to in the process of interpreting events. As Weick (1995) noted, "Sensemaking is about authoring as well as reading."

The Process of Sensemaking.

Coburn (2001a) describes three processes through which teachers engaged in sensemaking about reading instruction policy. They first *collaboratively constructed meanings* about the policy by linking directives to familiar frameworks. These meanings were then used in a *gatekeeping* function by which teachers selected in some policy messages and selected others out to maintain a sense of coherence with their shared

understandings. They also *negotiated technical and practical details* to translate their co-constructed meanings of the policy into concrete action in the classroom.

These processes mirror Weick's (1995) framework of sensemaking as a process of labeling and categorizing, creating plausible explanations, and then taking action which results in further sensemaking. Sensemaking begins with something that creates confusion and chaos (Weick, et al., 2005). At first, it is unclear what the problem is, or whether there is even a problem to be addressed as opposed to simply a momentary interruption or one-time unusual event. Eventually, as the situation progresses, people begin to organize the event into smaller, manageable pieces that relate to existing mental models and frameworks of knowledge and experience. This process of *noticing* and *bracketing* experience is the fundamental process of sensemaking. Discrepancies to the normal flow of events must be selected out as noticeable and then labeled to differentiate and identify them. These new labels are generated within categories of relevant experience. Once events are noticed and bracketed, plausible explanations are generated that locate the events within their context and prior histories and experiences.

One of the hallmarks, and more difficult properties, of sensemaking is that it is driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995; Weick, et al., 2005). Sensemaking involves embellishing the meaning of cues by linking them with more general ideas, as well as elaborating on them by invoking past experiences to explain them (Weick, 1995). In one sense, given that sensemaking is a retrospective process, complete accuracy in the recall and interpretation of events is not possible. With any

event, there are multiple possible ideas and experiences upon which cues can be embellished and elaborated. Events are also rarely stable, but instead shift and change as they unfold and as people make sense of them. Furthermore, past experiences are recalled as reconstructions, not faithful depictions, making accuracy even more unattainable (Weick, et al., 2005). The purpose of sensemaking is to orient new circumstances and events to present environments. In this context, "Accuracy is nice, but not necessary," (Weick, 1995, p. 56).

Sensegiving.

A corollary to sensemaking is *sensegiving*: attempting to influence sensemaking toward some preferred interpretation of events. The two processes often occur iteratively, sequentially, and reciprocally (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). They can also overlap, as when sensemakers convey meanings to others in the process of retrospection and labeling. Sensegiving in organizational contexts can take on many forms, from direct espousals of visions (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) to less obvious actions such as structuring activities to appeal to implementors' values (Bartunek, Krim, Necochea, & Humphries, 1999).

Like sensemaking, sensegiving is triggered by certain types of events. Some events present minimal disruption or have meanings and consequences that are readily apparent and easily understood. Others require more active guidance to interpret. Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) found that such events are characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty, and are highly relevant to stakeholders' interests. In these situations, leaders

are more likely to engage in active sensegiving to bridge differences between stakeholders.

Sensegiving enhances sensemaking theories by providing a venue to examine the role of power in the process. People in positions of power and authority (formal and informal) typically have greater influence over the ways people interpret and act on disruptions. Leaders and those with other forms of authority tend to have disproportionate influence over social relations, group identities, definitions of plausibility, acceptable interpretations, availability of environmental cues (by highlighting or suppressing information), and approval of actions and responses (Weick, et al., 2005). However, leaders' effectiveness as sensegivers is not always assured by their positions of authority. In order to shape interpretations of events, they must be seen as expert and credible (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007).

It is not only those at the top of organizations that have influence as sensegivers. Intermediaries, such as middle managers, can also be influential in shaping perceptions of events, particularly in organizations characterized by limited interactions between workers and senior managers (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). Subordinates, as well, can shape events, cues, interpretations, and responses insofar as they have expertise or access to information that authority figures do not have (as in decentralized, loosely coupled environments) (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). These types of power dynamics influence the way disruptions are interpreted and incorporated into the ongoing flow of activity.

Sensemaking theory can enhance our understanding of teachers' responses to performance pay by clarifying the social cognitive processes through which it is understood and acted upon. It also explicates the role of social interactions as the central mechanism through which teachers shape meanings about policies and devise means of carrying them out within their existing practices. The concept of sensegiving further provides a framework for examining how policymakers and teachers may interact as both givers and receivers of policy messages about performance pay. This relational framework prompts a more systemic, flexible view of policy implementation in which multiple actors negotiate policy meanings on an ongoing basis (Datnow, 2006).

Teachers' Sensemaking of Incentive-Based Reforms: The Case of Accountability Policy.

We currently have very limited understanding of the role of sensemaking in teachers' implementation of performance pay. However, researchers have examined teachers' sensemaking of accountability policies, which employ similar theories of action and tools to promote certain goals and behaviors. This work, thus, provides a useful example of what can be learned about performance pay with sensemaking frameworks.

Accountability policies, like performance-based compensation, seek to align teachers' goals with those of districts and states through the use of rewards (Loeb & McEwan, 2006). They are driven by learning standards and student performance data. States provide common sets of clearly defined learning standards, which form the basis for curriculum, instruction, assessments, and performance objectives. Schools and districts are evaluated on the basis of their performance in meeting these standards, with

limited guidance over specific curricula or instructional methods to be used (Smith & O'Day, 1991). Performance pay policies are similarly centered on standards and the attainment of performance goals (Heneman, Milanowski, & Kimball, 2007; Mohrman, Mohrman, & Odden, 1996; Odden, Kelley, Heneman, & Milanowski, 2001).

The literature on teachers' responses to accountability initiatives highlights the importance of understanding the circumstances under which policies work in particular settings and with particular participants (Honig, 2006b). Since accountability policies emphasize outcomes and objectives, and leave the process of attaining those goals to practitioners, interpretations of policy and capacity at the school level takes on heightened importance. When standards and objectives are misunderstood or when practitioners are uncertain about effective strategies to pursue, the mechanisms of accountability can fall short of achieving the desired end of improving learning for all students (Elmore, 2004; Spillane, 2005). Performance-based compensation, which employs the same types of policy levers, also runs the risk of failure if standards and objectives are not clearly understood or if teachers lack capacity or resources to make needed improvements in instruction.

However, the emphasis on learning standards and use of student performance data can also result in an increased focus among teachers on student learning and improvements in student achievement. Louis, Febey, and Schroeder (2005), using qualitative observations and interviews, found that district accountability policies prompted teachers to construct common interpretations of new directives as they

developed plans to implement the policies. In the high schools they studied, the policies facilitated instructional improvement by providing a framework around which teachers could discuss practice and make collective changes to curriculum and instruction.

The emphasis on achievement outcomes and student performance data that arises from accountability policies can also negatively affect teachers and instructional practices. Valli and Buese (2007) examined changes in elementary teachers' role expectations during a period of increasing high-stakes accountability mechanisms. They found that roles increased, expanded, and intensified as teachers incorporated policy directives to use student data for instructional planning and differentiate instruction. Teachers increased their collaborative work, but most of their time together was focused on analyzing data to group students for instruction and special programs and curriculum alignment and pacing. They spent little time in substantive discussions of pedagogy and learning.

In the same vein, Booher-Jennings (2005) examined elementary teachers' responses to a new requirement that students pass state achievement tests to be promoted to the next grade. Performance data became used to equate good teaching with high percentages of students passing district benchmark and state achievement tests. These measures were subsequently used by teachers to evaluate each other's competence and teaching effectiveness. The public presentation of teachers' passing rates at planning meetings further created a high-anxiety atmosphere that increased complaints about colleagues' effectiveness and eroded trust between teachers.

Overall, what this body of work suggests is that teachers' sensemaking of accountability policies can result in widely varying outcomes, depending on the specific policy being examined, the systemic context, and teachers' interactions with one another. As a social process, sensemaking leads teachers to collaboratively develop interpretive frameworks for policy that are constructed around not only the messages they receive about requirements, goals, and intent, but also their histories, existing practices, and shared knowledge. In some instances, the incentives contained in accountability policies focus teachers' efforts toward meaningful instructional improvement. In others, teachers' sensemaking results in compliance-oriented actions or behaviors that have a negative impact on relationships and the quality of instruction.

Implications for the Study

Research using sensemaking theories has explored the processes by which teachers interpret policies, developing shared understandings of policy messages that guide their adaptation or rejection of them in their classrooms. This research has, for the most part, concentrated on instructional, curricular, and accountability policies that directly affect teachers' core work of instruction (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Coburn, 2001a; Louis, et al., 2005; Valli & Buese, 2007). Performance-based compensation affects teachers' work more tangentially, by setting goals, promoting certain professional behaviors and activities, and altering conceptions of the qualities associated with professionalism and success (Milanowski, 2008a). Nonetheless, these policies represent

changes to norms, values, and objectives that influence teachers' interactions and priorities, prompting interpretation and sensemaking.

The influence of teachers' interactions on sensemaking is perhaps the most problematic for policymakers because it suggests that the same policy can be interpreted and acted on in very different ways. Indeed, policymakers and reformers expend a great deal of effort in trying to control teachers' interpretation and adaptation of policy through such means as technical assistance and efforts at obtaining "buy-in" (Hatch, 2001). Implementation research on performance-based compensation is indicative of this type of technical-rational perspective on implementation, stressing satisfaction and views about fairness in an attempt to determine whether teachers will allow incentives to influence their behaviors in intended ways. Such research has done little to inform policymakers or researchers about how teachers are acting on performance incentives in their schools and classrooms or about the potential of performance-based compensation reforms to lead to lasting improvements in student outcomes.

Cognitive approaches to policy implementation can help to fill in these gaps by unpacking teachers' sensemaking of performance pay and paying closer attention to contextual influences and social interactions in the process of implementation. By looking closely at the way performance pay is interpreted and acted on within schools and professional communities, we can better understand how these incentives may be received and responded to in different types of school environments. Given the often controversial nature of performance pay, more nuanced and comprehensive theories of

implementation could be valuable to policymakers in designing these policies and developing strategies for introducing them in different types of settings and circumstances. In terms of research, incorporating sensegiving processes into cognitive frameworks of policy implementation can help researchers to better understand how policymakers and policy implementers co-construct policy by simultaneously and iteratively making sense of policy meanings and messages. Explicit examination of these processes can lead research toward more interactive, flexible, and systemic models of educational policy implementation.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

The purpose of this study was to describe teachers' interpretations of performance-based compensation policy and to examine the relationships between their interpretations and those of policymakers driving the policy. These issues were explored using a sensemaking framework, which captures the processes through which people create meanings about new information and events.

The study addressed the following questions, which guided data collection and analysis:

1. What meanings do teachers construct about the goals, purposes, priorities, and intentions of performance-based compensation?
    A. How do they define the policy's goals, purposes, priorities, and intentions? What changes do they believe the policy is meant to bring about in the district? In the participating schools? Among teachers?
    B. What sources of information are most influential to them?
    C. How do they interpret formal policy messages from the district?
    D. How do they integrate policy messages from different sources?
2. How do these meanings compare with the assumptions and intentions of policymakers responsible for developing the program?
    A. What are the goals, intentions, priorities, and purposes of the policymakers responsible for the program? What changes do they hope to bring about in the district? In the participating schools? Among teachers?
    B. What do they think teachers think and believe about the policy?
    C. In what ways are teachers' and policymakers' interpretations of the policy and of each others' goals, intentions, and purposes similar? In what ways are they different?

3. What are the relationships between teachers' experiences with performance-based compensation policy influence and teachers' goals for their students' learning and their own professional goals and identities?

    A. How do teachers' interpretations of the policy influence their decisions about where to teach, what types of professional activities to engage in, and which instructional goals to pursue?

    B. How do teachers' interpretations of the policy influence the collective goals and activities they pursue within their schools?

In this chapter, I describe the study's research design, samples, data collection methods, and analytic process. I also provide an overview of performance pay policy in Texas, arguing that its history and current policy context make it particularly appropriate for a study of sensemaking and implementation.

Research Design

The National Research Council, in articulating a framework for scientific research in education, noted that, within social science, a range of research methods can and should be used to answer different types of research questions (Feuer, Towne, & Shavelson, 2002). Along with research questions, the theories employed to frame research questions usually call for certain methods of inquiry (Merriam, 1998). The research questions that emphasize interpretations of performance pay, as well as the cognitive theories of policy implementation and sensemaking frameworks that informed these questions, guided the study design.

The study employed qualitative case studies, a methodology uniquely suited to these questions and theoretical frameworks. Case studies, in which both historical and contemporary events are documented, focus on holistic examinations of the meaningful

aspects of real-life events and settings (Yin, 2003). They call for the incorporation of an array of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations – into rich descriptions of particular settings that can be analyzed individually or as groups in connection with variables of interest (Yin, 2003). In terms of sensemaking, case studies enable documentation and analysis of many different influences on interpretation (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Weick, 1995). They also allow direct examination of policy deliberation and enactment (Coburn, 2001b; Cohen & Ball, 1990).

Case studies may employ either quantitative or qualitative research methods, or both (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Merriam (1998) distinguishes qualitative case studies as being particularistic (focused on a particular situation, event, or phenomenon), descriptive, and heuristic in explaining how and why phenomena occur in particular ways. The advantage of qualitative case study methodology for this study was that it allowed for the depth of data collection and analysis needed to document teachers' construction and reconstruction of policy messages while also allowing comparisons along relevant policy dimensions (Coburn, 2001b; Yin, 2003). Qualitative inquiry, particularly interpretive approaches, emphasizes understanding the meanings people construct about their worlds (Merriam, 1998).[4] Theories of sensemaking similarly place these concerns at the center of examinations of how events influence people's actions. In contrast to quantitative research, in which relationships between variables of interest are examined by isolating them from the influence of other variables, qualitative research attempts to "reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole," (Merriam, 1998, p.

6). This makes qualitative inquiry ideal for examining the interactions between sensemakers, sensegivers, and context in constructing particular meanings about performance pay.

This type of data is difficult to attain with survey methods that have been more often used to study implementation of performance pay. As noted in Chapter Two, research on teachers' responses to compensation reforms has largely focused on measures of satisfaction, attitudes toward performance pay, and self-reports of impacts on instructional practice. Apart from the threats to external validity that arise in the use of self-reported data, survey methods are inherently limited in their ability to gather complex data on the processes of interpretation due to the need to limit responses to specific categories and the difficulty of clarifying or expanding on subjects' responses (Babbie, 1990).

The iterative nature of qualitative data collection and analysis, on the other hand, allows for exploration of topics and issues as they emerge, facilitating an examination of the interactive and nonlinear relationships between different system levels and events (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Patton, 2002). This depth of analysis and rich description of experiences can generate new theory about the implementation of performance pay. While the findings from a small group of case studies cannot be used to make claims about large populations of schools or teachers participating in performance pay programs, they can be used to generate useful new theoretical models and hypotheses that can be later explored in more generalizable studies (Yin, 2003).

The study design was multilevel, cross-case, and cross-sectional (Coburn, 2001b). It was multilevel in that multiple levels within the social system of the district were examined. The primary levels were the school and the district, but the state policy environment was also analyzed as an important influence on sensemaking and sensegiving. The use of multiple school sites facilitated comparative analysis of the ways in which school contexts influence teachers' interpretations of performance pay policies, enabling what Yin (2003) calls "theoretical replication" – contrasting results for reasons predicted by theory. Theoretical replication enables generalization to theory and bolsters the internal validity of qualitative research (Yin, 2003). In this study, factors relevant to implementation of performance pay policy and school performance acted as the predicting theory. Finally, the study is cross-sectional in that I collected data at a specific point in each school's participation in the program, some that were in the beginning stages and some that had had more experience.

Samples

I selected schools participating in a comprehensive performance-based compensation program in a mid-sized urban district in Texas. The district, Hill Independent School District, implemented its program as a pilot in 2007. The program had been in development, though, since 2004. The district and compensation program, along with an overview of performance pay policy in Texas, are described further in Chapter 4. In this section, I describe the case study schools and policymaking groups examined in the study.

Case Study Schools.

For this study, I selected two schools and two policymaking groups, the district central office and a district steering committee in which to examine teachers' and policymakers' sensemaking of this program.

As noted earlier, a study of this size cannot be used to generalize to a larger population of schools or teachers. Because qualitative inquiry was deemed the most appropriate method for my research questions and theoretical framework, I elected to create a sample of schools that would enable generalization to theories of performance pay and cognitive approaches to policy implementation. Generalization to theory entails selecting cases that vary on or exemplify variables of interest within a theoretical framework (Yin, 2003). This strategy enables findings to be related to theoretical assumptions and claims in order to elaborate and expand, if not directly test, them. A multiple-case design was selected over a single-case design to enable exploration of a variety of contexts that could influence teachers' meaning making about performance pay.

Purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select a panel of schools that varied on several criteria relevant to the policy. These criteria are as follows:

4. Average teacher experience
5. Percentage of economically disadvantaged students
6. School accountability rating
7. Time in program

Teacher experience has been found to be an important indicator of teachers' attitudes toward performance pay, as discussed in Chapter Two. Specifically, less experienced teachers tend to be more receptive to performance pay (Goldhaber, et al., 2007; Jacob & Springer, 2008; Springer, Podgursky, Lewis, Ehlert, Ghosh-Dastidar, Gronberg, Hamilton, Jansen, Lopez, Patterson, et al., 2008). Sampling both schools and teachers on this criteria (respondent sampling is described later in this section) provided an opportunity to better understand this common research finding by examining how (or whether) teachers with different levels of experience construct different meanings of performance pay.

Student socioeconomic status and school academic performance were included because they present different challenges to achieving performance objectives. Not only do schools with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students tend to have lower rates of academic achievement than schools with fewer disadvantaged students, but they also tend to have higher percentages of uncertified, undercertified (i.e., emergency or probationary certification or teaching out of field), and less experienced teachers (Ingersoll, 2001; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). Student demographics, specifically percentages of economically disadvantaged, English language learner, and special education students, are also an explicit part of the pilot program. School performance ratings were included as a criterion since the compensation program provides incentives for improvements in student performance. Student demographics and overall school performance have been found in studies of teachers' interpretations of

accountability to be important influences on the way they integrate policy pressures into instructional practices (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Valli & Buese, 2007). Thus, sampling on this criteria both draws on and extends this literature by enabling examination of how these factors may influence teachers' interpretations of individual as well as school-wide incentives.

Sensemaking theory suggests that teachers' interpretations of the program can be expected to change as they participate over time and have different experiences with it (Weick, 1995). To make sense of events, individuals and groups look at an outcome and then create accounts, or histories, of events to explain them and fit them into their frameworks of values and beliefs. These frameworks are socially constructed and so the histories that people create will differ according to their own experiences (Coburn & Stein, 2006; Weick, et al., 2005). Thus, schools' time in the program was included to capture changes that occur as teachers have more experiences with it. This criterion also makes the study unique in research on performance pay, which has thus far produced little information on teachers' long-term experiences.

Two schools were selected that presented a range of possibilities among all of these variables. A larger sample of 3-4 schools would have been optimal to provide more variation across the sampling criteria and to increase the overall number of subjects. However, given the data collection design, which relied primarily on interviews, and the inclusion of district-level subjects, a larger sample of schools would have been prohibitive in terms of time and resource demands. On the other hand, no single school

within the district represented a unique, critical, or revelatory circumstance that could have compelled a single-case design (Yin, 2003). Thus, a sample of two schools was deemed both appropriate and feasible. Both schools are elementary schools, due to the demands that would be presented by including secondary schools with larger faculties, different academic departments, and more complex administrative structures. Additionally, participating schools were classified in the program as Highest Needs, Higher Needs, or non-high needs based on their proportions of low-income, English language learner, and special needs students. Only one school in the program was classified as Non-Highest Needs, so the two schools were selected to represent one Highest Needs and one Higher Needs school. The schools are described in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Case Study School Descriptions

School Characteristic	McCoy Elementary	Thompson Elementary	Participating School Average/ Mode
Average Teacher Experience	18 years	7 years	11 Years
Economically Disadvantaged Students	73%	98%	70%
English Language Learners	36%	73.2%	32%
Special Education Students	19%	5%	11%
School Performance Rating	Academically Acceptable	Academically Acceptable	Academically Acceptable
Time in Program	2 years	New	2 years
Classification in Program	Higher Needs School	Highest Needs School	Highest Needs School

Note. School data are taken from the year prior to beginning participation in the performance-based compensation program (McCoy, 2006-2007; Thompson, 2008-2009). Averages and modes are based on data from the original cohort of nine participating schools in the year prior to participation in the program (2006-2007).

The two case schools selected had demographics at the lower, middle, and upper ranges on each criterion. McCoy Elementary had average populations of economically disadvantaged and English language learners, but higher than average percentages of special education students. It also had the highest average teacher experience of all schools participating in the program, with nearly half (45%) of its teachers having 20 years or more teaching experience. McCoy began participation as a non-high needs

school. In 2008, Hill ISD created a new category for pilot schools, Higher Need, which identifies schools that are in the top 50% of Hill ISD schools based on their percentages of economically disadvantaged, special education, and English language learner students. Based on this new classification, beginning in 2009, McCoy teachers were newly eligible for bonuses for retention and mentoring. This change in classification made the school an even more interesting case for this study since teachers underwent a change in the program after having already participated for two years.

Thompson Elementary had the highest percentages of economically disadvantaged students and English language learners of all participating schools. At the same time, its teachers were relatively less experienced and it had a relatively low percentage of special education students. McCoy had participated in the program since it began in 2007, whereas Thompson was in its first year of participation during the study's data collection period. Taken together, these schools provided a wide range of experiences with and perceptions of Hill ISD's compensation initiative and performance pay.

School Respondents.

Within each school, I identified, with the assistance of principals, a group of four to eight teachers (which represented about 10 percent to 20 percent of teacher full-time equivalents at each school) for data collection. Teachers were contacted by principals at each school and asked to indicate their willingness to participate. I then contacted interested teachers regarding participating in focus groups or individual interviews.

Principals and, at Thompson Elementary, the assistant principal, assisted in scheduling focus groups. All interviews and focus groups took place at the schools, either after school or during professional development days.

As with school selection, teachers were selected based on their teaching experience and their time in the program. Using teacher performance on program objectives as a selection criterion was considered since an external evaluation of the program found that teachers who achieved performance objectives held more favorable views of the program (Burns, Gardner, & Meeuwsen, 2009). However, performance was ultimately rejected for two reasons. First, and most importantly, one of the case study schools was just beginning participation in the program and so did not have performance data available for its teachers. Second, almost all teachers in the program (83%) met at least one SLO and a majority (64%) met two . Thus, there were few teachers who did not meet any SLOs. Performance appears to be an important factor in teachers' views of performance pay (Springer, Podgursky, Lewis, Ehlert, Ghosh-Dastidar, Gronberg, Hamilton, Jansen, Lopez, Stecher, et al., 2008), and would be a valuable factor to include in future studies. For this study and this sample, however, it was deemed less important as a selection criterion.

Administrators at each school were also included in data collection. These included principals and, at Thompson, the assistant principal. These administrators were included to provide information on implementation of the program across teachers in

each school and to serve as a check on teachers' descriptions of their schools' participation in the program. The samples for each school are described in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2. School Sample Descriptions

School	Subjects	Grades	Teacher Experience	Special Student Populations Taught by Respondents
McCoy Elementary	4 teachers 1 principal	PreK-5	5-18 years	ELL, Special Education
Thompson Elementary	8 teachers 1 principal 1 assistant principal	PreK-5	Beginning-8 years	ELL

Four teachers and one administrator were interviewed at McCoy. Eight teachers and two administrators were interviewed at Thompson (the teacher interviewed individually had also participated in the focus group). The difference in sample sizes between the schools was due to some difficulties in recruiting participants at McCoy and scheduling interviews around an after-school tutoring program there. However, the teachers interviewed at both schools represented a range of grade levels and experience that fit with the overall profile of the schools (see Table 3.1). Overall, the samples presented a sufficient panel for a case study of this nature.

Across both schools, teachers ranged in teaching experience from beginning (i.e., in the first year of teaching after receiving full certification) to 18 years. Six of the eight teachers at Thompson were in their first 5 years of teaching, one was a beginning teacher,

and one had eight years of experience. Three teachers at McCoy had more than ten years of experience, and included the most experienced teacher in the sample. These ranges matched well with the overall experience levels of teachers in both schools. Three of the four teachers at McCoy taught English language learners, and one taught special education students. Three teachers at McCoy taught TAKS-tested grades (grades 3-5), and one taught prekindergarten. Five teachers at Thompson taught TAKS grade levels, and three taught in grades prekindergarten through second grade. The sample also included teachers who had participated in all aspects of the compensation program, including mentoring (one mentor at McCoy and one mentee at Thompson) and professional development activities (one teacher at McCoy). It also included one teacher at McCoy who was serving as a campus support representative for setting performance objectives.

District Policymakers.

The policymakers selected for the study included members of the Steering Committee overseeing the compensation initiative, made up of district, teacher association, and community representatives. The Steering Committee was created in 2007 to implement and oversee the program after it was approved by the Board of Trustees. The committee was responsible for developing the components of the program, for working with external consultants during the development phase, and for overseeing implementation of the pilot in its first year. Besides the Steering Committee, the district created a program office responsible for managing the program. The program office

consists of a director, public relations specialist, administrative staff, and a staff of liaisons who work directly with pilot schools on implementation of the program.

Steering Committee Respondents.

Membership on the Steering Committee changed somewhat over the years, but several key members had remained since its inception. Three of these members, who were selected to provide institutional history and unique insight into program goals, purposes, and changes, were included in this study. They included the Program Director, the president of the district's teacher association, and a representative from the city's business community (a former president of the Chamber of Commerce). These three individuals also represented perspectives from sources (district, teacher association, and business community) that have greatly influenced the development of the program and were expected to be influential in teachers' interpretations of it.

Program Office Respondents.

Within the program office, four staff members were recruited to participate in the study. This group included four administrators, supervised by the Program Director, who provided training and support to teachers and principals in developing student learning objectives submitted by teachers as part of the program, evaluated and approved those objectives, oversaw mentors, and managed the professional development component of the program. These were key features of the program. Their interactions with pilot schools also gave them unique insight into schools' implementation experiences and the ways in which program goals and processes were communicated to teachers.

Data Collection

The primary methods of data collection were interviews and focus groups. Documents such as program guidelines, informational materials, funding applications, Board of Trustees meeting packets and minutes, grant applications, and technical assistance materials pertaining to the program, the district, and the schools were also reviewed. Student learning objectives submitted by teachers at each school were examined for their content. Additionally, quantitative data on school and teacher outcomes and demographics were incorporated into the case studies for descriptive purposes. Interviews for this study began in November 2009 and concluded in February 2010. Steering Committee members and district program office staff were interviewed between November 2009 and December 2009. School participants were interviewed between December 2009 and February 2010. At both schools, administrator interviews were conducted before teacher interviews. Table 3.3 describes the data collected for each case included in the study.

Table 3.3. Data Collection by Case

Case	Total Participants	# Interviews	Interview Time	Documents
McCoy Elementary	5 (4 teachers, 1 administrator)	1 focus group (2 teachers) 3 individual interviews (2 teachers, 1 administrator)	2 hours, 45 minutes	• Accountability system reports • District DATE grant applications
Thompson Elementary	10 (8 teachers, 2 administrators)	1 focus group (8 teachers) 3 individual interviews (1 teacher, 2 administrators)	2 hours, 43 minutes	• School TEEG applications • Accountability system reports • District DATE grant applications
Steering Committee	3	3 individual interviews	2 hours, 34 minutes	• Board of Trustees meeting minutes and materials packets • Program descriptions and informational materials • District DATE applications • Accountability system reports
District Central Office	4 staff members	1 focus group	1 hour, 11 minutes	• Program descriptions and informational materials • Program evaluation reports • District DATE applications • Accountability system reports
Total	22	3 focus groups 9 individual interviews	9 hours, 13 minutes	

Interviews and focus groups with all participants focused on their accounts of the development of the program; perceptions of program goals, purposes, and implementation; and communication between the district and schools about the program. Teachers and administrators were also asked about changes in instructional practices since beginning participation. Central office staff were also asked to describe their work with teachers and principals. Interviews and focus groups were semi-structured, with a protocol of predefined questions used while allowing the order of questioning to vary somewhat and clarifying questions to be asked as deemed necessary (Weiss, 1994). All interviews and focus groups were recorded. Audio recordings were transcribed into written texts for analysis. Interview protocols are included in Appendix A.

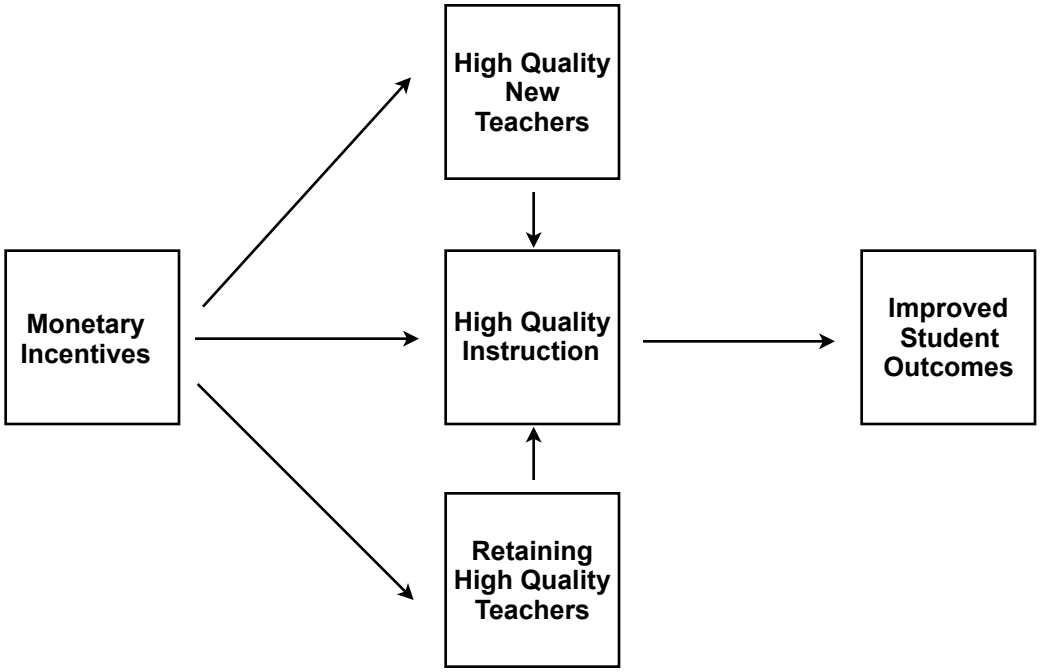
Many studies of sensemaking have included observations as a central method of data collection (Coburn, 2001b; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Louis, et al., 2005). Most of these studies have examined sensemaking of policies and initiatives that affect organizational practices and so are actively discussed and deliberated within group settings. Coburn (2001b), for example, studied teachers' interpretations of a reading instruction policy. Teachers discussed the policy collaboratively to understand how to alter their practices to fit the new requirements. With performance-based compensation, few such structured opportunities exist for teachers to actively negotiate the meaning of incentives and requirements at length. Thus, observations were not an explicit part of my data collection plan. Additionally, observations in sensemaking research seems to serve primarily the function of describing the processes of sensemaking. While such study and

analysis has been invaluable in clarifying sensemaking processes, existing frameworks were sufficient to enable analysis for this study (see, for example Coburn, 2001a; Louis, et al., 2005; Weick, 1995).

Analysis

Interview and focus group data formed the basis for individual case and cross-case analyses describing the interpretations made of the Hill ISD performance-based compensation program, comparisons between different groups of participants, and comparisons between schools. These analyses were conducted according to two analytical frameworks. One used the theory of action of performance pay, as described in Chapter One, as a means of examining the implementation of the program. I derived this theory of action from my examination of the literature on performance pay discussed in Chapter Two. According to the model graphically displayed in Figure 3.1, analysis focused on the perceptions of teachers and district central office administrators of the purpose and goals of the program as well as its influence on two key areas of teacher behavior: instruction and retention. This analysis was not intended to present causal findings about outcomes in these areas, but to highlight the ways these two different groups of stakeholders understood the role of performance pay in teachers' actions and decisions in them.

Figure 3.1. Theory of Action of Performance Pay



While this model provided the framework for developing interview and focus group protocols, and defining areas of coding, sensemaking theories provided the framework for interpreting subjects' responses. For each case, accounts of the program's purpose, development and implementation were constructed. These types of accounts are central to the sensemaking process, which involves clarifying situations and fitting them into prior experiences and worldviews in order to understand and act upon them (Weick, 1995). These accounts were integrated with descriptive data to develop profiles of the four main sub-cases - McCoy Elementary, Thompson Elementary, the district central office, and the Steering Committee. These profiles were then used to develop thematic cross-case analyses. Cross-case analyses included comparisons between the two schools,

between schools collectively and the district, between individual schools and the Steering Committee, and between subject groups (teachers, principals, policymakers). Profiles of individual participants were not included in the analysis both because of the limited data obtained from each participant, and because of the focus of the research questions on organizational sensemaking.

Data were coded inductively using an iterative process to develop increasingly specific coding schemes that described and categorized respondents' comments (Patton, 2002). Coding was performed using HyperResearch qualitative analysis software. This program enabled transcripts to be organized into cases for coding, for frequencies of codes by case to be generated, and for analytical models to be developed using codes and data from transcripts.

The codes fell into 12 main categories, or families. Most of these families contained several sub-codes that described them in more specific terms. Appendix B presents the families and sub-codes, along with frequencies for each case - Steering Committee, District Central Office, McCoy Elementary, and Harris Elementary.The coding families and sub-codes were derived solely from the data, and largely followed the topics in the interview protocols. The families included Challenges to Implementation, Changes Resulting from Program, Communication, Effects of Incentives, Goal of Teacher Retention, Instructional Practices, Participation in Program, Policy Environment, Program History, Program Purpose, Program Components and Requirements, Program Theory of Action, and Reasons for Participating.

These codes were applied to all cases, enabling comparisons of the occurrence of themes across cases. It is important to note that these frequencies reflect interview passages that varied in length and complexity, from brief mentions to lengthy exchanges between several participants in focus groups. The coding frequencies represent the number of times any passage of any length contained information relevant to a particular theme (Merriam, 1998). As seen in Appendix B, code frequencies between cases broke down largely according to levels in the system: teachers and school administrators tended to comment on different topics than did district administrators and policymakers. There were also several differences in frequencies between the two schools and between the Steering Committee and the District Central Office. Additionally, even on topics on which all cases provided data, there were numerous differences in the frequency of themes between cases. These difference add to the internal validity of the data by demonstrating that the four cases were distinct in their patterns of responses (Patton, 2002).

Throughout the analytic process, I used information from different respondents, as well as documents, to triangulate data so that interpretations were supported by more than one source of data or subjects (Patton, 2002). In analyzing patterns in the data and generating explanations for them, I looked for disconfirming evidence and alternative themes to enhance the external validity of the study (Yin, 2003). District program evaluation reports were a particularly useful source of data for assessing validity since they examined teachers' attitudes, behaviors, and program outcomes across program

schools and participants. These evaluations provided some means for determining the generalizability of findings from this study to other teachers and schools in the program. Additionally, I obtained descriptions of events and facts to individuals who did not participate as interviewees in the study, but were familiar with the program and its history for their confirmation. Given the complex and political nature of the program, I felt that the perspectives of individuals not involved with data collection would provide me with the most impartial information about the program's history and development.

Chapter 4: Performance Pay in Texas and Hill Independent School District

In this chapter, I describe the policy context of performance pay in Texas, as well as Hill ISD and its performance pay program. This overview demonstrates that Hill ISD created and enacted its performance pay program in an environment in which there were numerous calls for performance pay policies by state policymakers and interest in other performance pay initiatives around the country. However, there was little consensus about its goals or about how to structure such policies. This policy context was reflected in Hill ISD's program, which incorporated multiple incentives and mechanisms that advanced multiple goals.

Performance Pay Policy in Texas

At the time Hill ISD implemented its pilot performance pay program, Texas had gained a high profile in teacher compensation reform, with one of the largest performance incentive systems in the nation. The District Awards for Teacher Excellence (DATE) program affected teachers in nearly 2,000 schools (approximately 22% of all Texas public schools). Like programs in other states, DATE was relatively new, but was not the state's first experience with performance pay. Texas had experimented with compensation reform for over 20 years. However, most recent policy initiatives had yet to have an impact on large numbers of teachers even though they have created considerable debate among state policymakers. This created a context for Hill ISD's program in which policymakers had been working with performance pay for several years, while most teachers in the state were either new to the reform or had yet to experience it firsthand.

Early Compensation Reform Initiatives.

Texas began experimenting with compensation reform at the state level in 1984 with the passage of the landmark school reform bill, House Bill 72. Some districts had already implemented incentive-based compensation programs, such as compensation for advanced degrees, but HB72 created the first statewide incentive program. This bill, along with new requirements for student achievement testing, graduation requirements, and grade requirements for extracurricular activities, included requirements for teachers to pass competency tests to earn (and, for current teachers at the time, maintain) certification. It also created the Texas Teacher Career Ladder, which provided advancement opportunities for teachers who gained knowledge and skills through professional development and continued education. It also provided monetary incentives to teachers who performed well on appraisals. To that end, a uniform teacher appraisal system, the Texas Teacher Appraisal System (TTAS)[5] was authorized in the bill.

The Career Ladder created four steps in the salary scale through which could teachers could advance with experience, appraisals, and professional development. Upon being promoted to each step, teachers could earn salary supplements ranging from $1,500 at Step 1 to $6,000 at Step 4. Districts had authority to set exact supplement amounts and make decisions about teachers' advancement through the steps. When it was introduced, all new teachers and most current teachers were placed at Step 1, meaning they had to advance to Step 2 to begin earning salary supplements (Texas Education Agency, 1998).

From its beginning, funding for the Career Ladder program was problematic. Districts were allocated funds based on student enrollment rather than on teachers employed. The allotment for the 1983-1984 school year was $50 per student. This increased to $90 per student by 1992-1993, or $291 million for 132,855 teachers (Texas Education Agency, 1998), which amounted to roughly $2,200 per teacher. Nearly ten years after it began, no teachers had been placed at Step 4 and local funds were needed to pay supplements to teachers at Steps 2 and 3. Besides insufficient funding, the Career Ladder faced other challenges. Teachers were skeptical about the objectivity of performance appraisals and the qualifications of appraisers, including their principals (Springer, Podgursky, Lewis, Ehlert, Ghosh-Dastidar, Gronberg, Hamilton, Jansen, Lopez, Stecher, et al., 2008). On the other hand, there were also concerns that appraisers may have been reluctant to give teachers low scores since above average performance was required to advance to higher steps (Cornett & Gaines, 1994). Consequently the Texas Legislature repealed the program in 1993 (Texas Education Agency, 1998).

Before the Career Ladder was repealed, efforts had begun to align compensation and funding with Texas' burgeoning student assessment and accountability system. In 1990, Governor Ann Richards created the Governor's Educational Excellence Awards Committee to develop a pilot program to provide monetary awards to schools with high levels of improvement in student achievement (Texas Education Agency, 1998). In 1991, the Texas Legislature expanded this program, which became the Texas Successful Schools Awards System. This program provided school-based performance awards to

schools based on performance in the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), which compiles various school and district performance indicators and is used to assign performance ratings. Schools could receive monetary awards for either high performance or high improvement as compared to schools with similar student populations. Awards ranged from $250 to $175,000 and were based on student enrollment. They could be used for a variety of school improvement purposes, but most schools used them for technology and instructional materials. A small number of schools used them for direct awards to teachers (Texas Education Agency, 1998).

By the 2001-2002 school year, the Texas Legislature had stopped appropriating funds for the Texas Successful Schools Awards System. While more popular than the Career Ladder, the program was beset by several problems. The criteria for awards were complicated and not easily understood, awards were often very small, and there were long delays between assessment of performance and distribution of awards. These issues were seen as muting the potential effectiveness of the program in inducing greater efforts toward improving student achievement (Springer, Podgursky, Lewis, Ehlert, Ghosh-Dastidar, Gronberg, Hamilton, Jansen, Lopez, Stecher, et al., 2008).

An evaluation of the Texas Successful Schools Awards System by the Texas Education Agency (1998) had concluded that the best use of the awards was to distribute them directly to teachers and professional staff as performance incentives. They also recommended that incentives be based on multiple indicators of performance and that eligibility criteria be stable and understood well by teachers. These recommendations,

along with the state's experience with the Career Ladder, helped to inform the larger and more assertive actions toward implementing performance pay in the 2000s.

Performance Pay Policy in Texas in the Twenty-First Century.

In 2003, a sea change in Texas politics and governance took place. The Republican party won a majority in the Texas House of Representatives for the first time since Reconstruction. The party already held a majority in the Texas Senate and Governor Rick Perry was also a Republican. This gave the party an opportunity to enact a more conservative agenda in many areas of public policy. At the same time, education had again come to the policy fore due to a school financing lawsuit filed in 2001 against the state by over 300 school districts. Filing under the name West Orange Cove, the districts argued that limits on property taxes contained in school funding formulas were unconstitutional and that state funding for schools was unequal and inadequate. The legal imperative to reform school financing provided the new majority party an opportunity to advance myriad other educational reforms. Between 2003 and 2006, the Texas Legislature addressed school finance in two regular and seven special sessions.[6] During this period, along with finance, legislators addressed policy issues related to accountability, teacher compensation, student assessment, and a variety of special programs.

Teacher compensation figured prominently in the school finance debates, as teacher salaries represented the largest expenditure item for most schools and districts. Distribution of teachers and teacher quality were also central issues in debates over

funding equity and adequacy. In 2004, the same year the West Orange Cove suit went to trial, Governor Perry proposed a Teacher Excellence Incentive Plan, the first in a series of proposals to introduce performance pay into statewide teacher compensation programs. The plan featured a state incentive fund to finance incentives, voluntary participation by districts and schools, locally designed incentive plans, and awards to teachers for performance and assignment to underperforming schools with high proportions of economically disadvantaged students (Springer, Podgursky, Lewis, Ehlert, Ghosh-Dastidar, Gronberg, Hamilton, Jansen, Lopez, Stecher, et al., 2008). Later that year, the Legislature's Joint Select Committee on Public School Finance recommended an Educational Excellence Fund to provide performance awards to teachers performing in the top 15% of teachers in their districts on value-added measures of student achievement. They also recommended incentives for school performance that would be distributed to teachers, administrators, and professional staff in top-performing schools. These proposals were included in a bill filed during the fourth called (special) session of the 78th Legislature that year. The bill also included reforms to school funding formulas to address issues arising from the West Orange Cove suit. However, it did not pass.

By 2005, when the Legislature met in regular session, the district court presiding over the West Orange Cove case had decided in favor of the plaintiff school districts. The Texas Attorney General appealed the decision, but school finance and education reforms were nonetheless high priorities for the Legislature. The Chair of the House Committee on Public Education sponsored House Bill 2, an omnibus education reform bill that was

similar to the bill filed in the special session the previous year. Along with school funding proposals, it included a proposal for an Educator Excellence Incentive Program. It was similar to the proposal made by Governor Perry, except that it did not specify awards for teachers assigned to hard-to-staff schools. It did specify that awards must be distributed to schools with high achievement, growth in achievement, or both. It also allowed incentives to be distributed to teachers based on performance indicators other than student achievement. The bill passed in the Texas House, but met resistance in the Texas Senate, where the Chair of the Senate Committee on Education had proposed a simpler incentive program that would provide awards to schools with high proportions of economically disadvantaged students that demonstrated high improvement in test scores. Funds would be used to provide incentives to teachers based on performance as well as assignment to hard-to-staff schools or subjects. Both of these proposals failed to pass the Legislature, and other performance pay proposals failed to pass in two subsequent special sessions as legislators continued to grapple with school finance.

In November 2005, Governor Perry issued an executive order directing the Texas Education Agency to create a pilot performance pay program with $10 million in annual federal discretionary funds. The agency created the Governor's Educator Excellence Awards (later known as the Governor's Educator Excellence Grant, or GEEG), which provided grants to high-performing or high-improving schools with proportions of economically disadvantaged students in the top third of schools in the state. Schools receiving grants developed plans to provide incentives to teachers for student

performance, collaboration, and other demonstrations of professionalism related to student achievement. Funds could also be used, in part, to award teachers assigned to hard-to-staff subjects, for professional development, for mentoring and induction, for awards to other school staff, or for other professional activities. One hundred schools were selected and invited to participate (all but two accepted; the two that declined were replaced with other eligible schools that accepted). The program was designed to last three years, beginning in the 2006-2007 school year and ending in 2008-2009 (Springer, et al., 2009).

That same month, the Supreme Court of Texas struck down most of the decision of the district court in the West Orange Cove case regarding school funding equity and adequacy. However, they held that property tax limits contained in school funding formulas were unconstitutional and gave the Legislature until June 1, 2006 to rectify the problem.

In response, Governor Perry called another special session for the spring of 2006. In this session, the Legislature passed House Bill 1, which contained school funding reforms, programs to improve college readiness among high school graduates, funding for teacher mentoring programs, and two performance incentive programs. The Awards for Student Achievement program (later known as the Texas Educator Excellence Grant, or TEEG) was very similar in structure to GEEG. It authorized up to $100 million annually to be distributed to schools along the same criteria as GEEG, except that schools were required to be in the top 50% of schools statewide in percentage of economically

disadvantaged students. The criteria for awards to teachers were nearly identical to those of GEEG. The Educator Excellence Awards program (later known as the District Awards for Teacher Excellence, or DATE) was similar to the proposal that had been made by the Chair of the Senate Committee on Education. It provided grants to districts (any district could apply) to distribute among schools for the provision of performance awards to teachers. Awards must be made on the basis of student achievement, but grant funds could also be used for mentoring, stipends for assignment to hard-to-staff subjects, attainment of advanced degrees, awards to principals and other staff, or to implement components of TAP. TEEG began in the 2006-2007 school year, while DATE began in 2007-2008. Both programs were structured as annual grants, meaning schools and districts were selected and funds provided each year. They were funded through an Educator Excellence Fund that could provide up to $1,000 per classroom teacher each year, totaling close to $300 million ("Texas Education Code," 2006). At the time, this was the largest teacher performance incentive program in the country (Springer, Podgursky, Lewis, Ehlert, Ghosh-Dastidar, Gronberg, Hamilton, Jansen, Lopez, Stecher, et al., 2008).

In the 2007 regular legislative session, $247 million was authorized for the Educator Excellence Fund, with $97 million allocated for TEEG and the remainder for DATE. These funds were in jeopardy briefly during the session when the House surprisingly voted to eliminate all funding for TEEG and DATE, and instead direct those funds toward an across-the-board increase in the minimum salary schedule for teachers. The move was later reversed by passage of a later budget bill. Aggressive lobbying from

teacher associations opposed to the programs was seen as one of the primary reasons for the move (Fikac, 2007).

In the 2009 regular session, the Legislature did not authorize funds for TEEG. The program, in its third cycle, had met with several problems. First, the eligibility criteria had resulted in many schools being eligible in one year, but not the next. This was due partly to fluctuations in school performance ratings, but also to changes in proportions of economically disadvantaged students. Evaluations had also shown little impact on student achievement, while teachers reported that the program had had little influence on their teaching (Springer, Podgursky, Lewis, Ehlert, Ghosh-Dastidar, Gronberg, Hamilton, Jansen, Lopez, Stecher, et al., 2008). These problems caused some legislators to doubt the program's potential to be effective, instead preferring to dedicate resources to the competing DATE program (Stutz, 2009).

The Legislature authorized $147 million for the DATE program, which had not been without controversies of its own. About 100 districts that had indicated their intent to apply for DATE grants in 2007 subsequently changed their minds and did not apply (Stutz, 2008). Among all districts that did not apply, some voiced concerns about the program's effects on school culture and professional collegiality. Many also indicated that they would consider participating in the future if either awards were larger or requirements for districts to contribute matching funds were eliminated (Springer, Lewis, et al., 2010). At that time, districts were required to provide a 15% match in awards during the first year of participation, and additional matching funds in the second and

third years. These requirements were eliminated in 2009. As of 2009-2010, about 2,000 schools in 203 districts (including Hill ISD) participated in the DATE program, representing about 22% of all public schools in Texas (Springer, Lewis, et al., 2010).

These statewide programs have greatly increased the reach of performance pay policy in Texas. Before the creation of TEEG and DATE, only about 12% of districts in Texas incorporated performance incentives into their compensation programs (although considerably more offered incentives for qualifications, assignment to hard-to-staff schools and subjects, and other professional activities) (Springer, Podgursky, Lewis, Ehlert, Ghosh-Dastidar, Gronberg, Hamilton, Jansen, Lopez, Stecher, et al., 2008). A few districts had implemented high-profile performance pay plans in the 1990s, notably the Dallas Independent School District and the Aldine Independent School District. With the creation of TEEG and DATE, as well as the federal Teacher Incentive Fund (Dallas ISD and the Houston Independent School District were recipients in 2006), considerably more districts, schools, and teachers are gaining experience with this policy.

At the same time, performance-based compensation remains a relatively new and limited phenomenon for Texas public school teachers. As of the 2007-2008 school year, only 27% of districts had compensation plans that incorporated incentives for performance (72% of these districts were participants in TEEG or GEEG) (Springer, Podgursky, Lewis, Ehlert, Ghosh-Dastidar, Gronberg, Hamilton, Jansen, Lopez, Stecher, et al., 2008). This percentage was an increase from years prior to the creation of the statewide incentive programs, but it still represented fewer than one-third of districts in

the state. While policy debates over performance pay had been ongoing among state policymakers for almost a decade when Hill ISD began its performance pay program, many Texas teachers had yet to experience these initiatives. For most of those who had become involved with performance pay, it remained a new and evolving practice. This included teachers in Hill ISD, which had never had a performance-based compensation system. Teachers in the district were thus reliant on policymakers to provide them with frameworks through which to interpret the new performance pay program.

Performance Pay in Hill Independent School District[7]

The Hill Independent School District is a mid-sized urban district encompassing the city limits of a mid-sized city that had experienced rapid change over the previous 10-15 years. From 2000 to 2009, district enrollment increased by only less than 10%. However, the composition of the student body changed more dramatically. Enrollment of Hispanic students grew by nearly 30%; enrollment of English language learners increased by almost 75%; enrollment of economically disadvantaged students grew by more than 30%.[8] These changes made the district majority-Hispanic as well as majority-economically disadvantaged. At the same time, Hill ISD had been classified by the state since 2000 as a "property-rich" district under Texas's school financing system. That means the district was required to provide a portion of its tax revenue to the state to be distributed to poorer school districts, a process known as recapture.[9]

This classification belied the challenges faced by Hill ISD in educating its increasingly diverse student population. Schools in low-income neighborhoods with high

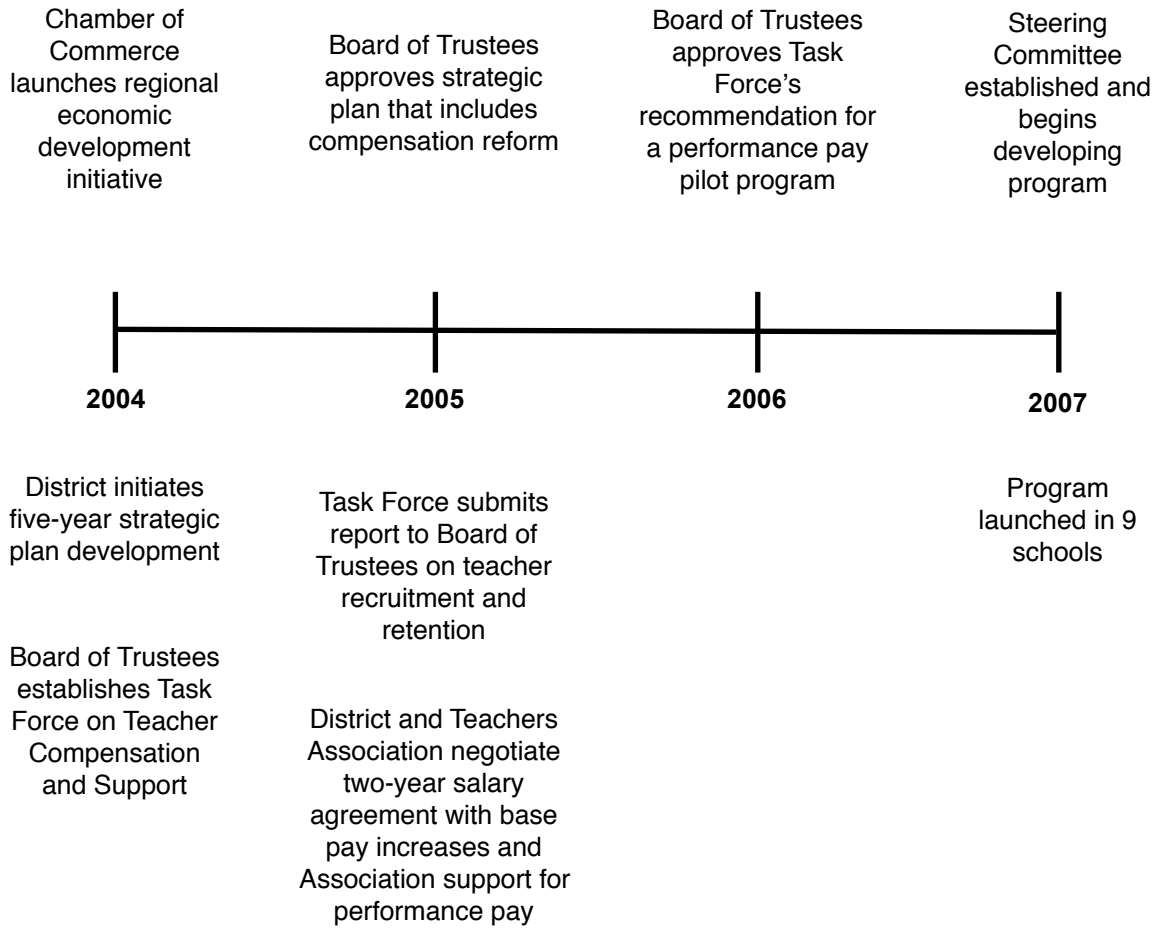
proportions of African American and Hispanic students on the city's east side consistently performed below their counterparts in wealthier neighborhoods with larger proportions of white students. In response, the district began an initiative in 2002, known as the Blueprint to Leave No Child Behind, to improve these underperforming schools. It provided curriculum programs, training for teachers and administrators, student assessments, technology, and parent involvement structures to schools designated by the district as underperforming. Two middle schools and four elementary schools were selected to participate. This initiative was expanded to include high schools, and was eventually combined with a high school redesign initiative when the district received a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2005 to improve the quality of secondary education. Two of the district's lowest performing high schools were identified for this initiative.

In 2008, however, the district was forced by the state to close one of these high schools because of persistent ratings of Academically Unacceptable in the state accountability system. In 2009, the district's superintendent of ten years, who had ushered in the Blueprint and High School Redesign, as well as other reform initiatives, retired. Shortly after, the state threatened the closure of another low-income middle school and issued a warning that a second high school (also low-income and in the same geographic area as the other two) could be closed the following year barring substantial improvement in student performance (both schools remain open).

Catalysts for Hill ISD's Performance-Based Compensation Program.

In 2004, as the High School Redesign initiative was being developed and as the Texas Legislature was beginning its engagement with performance pay policies, Hill ISD began developing its strategic plan for 2005 through 2010. It was during this process that performance pay began to emerge as an initiative in the district. Over the next three years, the performance pay program was developed, funded, and began to be implemented as a pilot program. Figure 4.1 presents a timeline of key events in the program's creation. As this timeline shows, there were many groups and individuals involved in developing Hill ISD's performance pay program. What is clear from examining this history, though, is that the district administration, particularly the Superintendent, appeared to be the primary catalyst for the initiative. The district administration, along with the teachers association, guided the program toward an agenda of instructional support and professional development, minimizing the role of financial incentives in its theory of action.

Figure 4.1. Key Events in the Development of Hill ISD's Performance Pay Program



The strategic planning process formally started in June of 2004. The process involved examination of trends and indicators, along with discussions with numerous stakeholders about the district's goals and priorities. A Strategic Planning Panel on Goals, Priorities, and Performance Indicators used this information to develop recommendations for the district administration. The committee was chaired by two local business leaders and a law enforcement official. Membership included representatives from district

administration, schools, the private sector, and community-based organizations. These recommendations were then reviewed and the Superintendent presented a final draft plan to the Board of Trustees in August of 2005.

One of the Panel's six recommended priorities was to "recruit, develop, and retain highly effective teachers and administrators." One of the recommended strategies under that priority was to "develop and implement a comprehensive long-range plan to provide greater supports and incentives to teachers, principals, and staff, and encourage highly effective teachers to continue service in our highest-needs schools." They also recommended enhancements to professional development, improved internal communications, strategies to ensure that school reconstitutions do not result in loss of highly effective staff, and greater workforce diversity in the district. All six of the Panel's recommended priorities were included in the final plan approved by the Board of Trustees. However, the priority above was altered in the district's final submission to "recruit, develop, retain, *and reward* highly effective teachers and administrators," (emphasis added). The above strategy was likewise changed to "develop and implement a comprehensive long-range plan to provide greater supports and incentives, *including compensation*, to teachers, principals, and staff, and encourage highly effective teachers to continue service in our highest-needs schools," (emphasis added). Both sets of recommendations are in Appendix C.

These changes indicate that a great deal of the press for performance pay arose from the interests of the district, particularly the Superintendent, who was responsible for

developing the final strategic plan, more so than from generalized community interests such a policy. The most likely source of interest from the community would have been from the business community. This community was indeed highly engaged in education. Indeed, the local Chamber of Commerce had embarked on a five-year regional economic development strategy in January of 2004 that encompassed four sets of goals: recruiting new businesses to the area, retaining businesses in the area, improving regional competitiveness, and strengthening investor relations. The regional business community had committed to investing $14.4 million to the strategy. The Chamber's primary education goal was to increase the number of high school students who enter and complete higher education by closing the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students. While this goal was associated with the largest percentages of the five-year budget in the area of improving regional competitiveness (15% of the total budget), it paled in comparison to the investment in recruiting new businesses (58% of total; retaining businesses also took 6% of the budget). Additionally, the Chamber did not specify performance pay or other teacher quality policies as strategies for achieving their educational goals, although they did support Hill ISD in developing its performance pay program by creating their own Task Force on Compensation to advise the district.

In August of 2004, as Hill ISD's strategic planning process was getting underway, the Board of Trustees approved the Superintendent's recommendation to establish a Teacher Compensation and Support Task Force (which was also referred to as a committee or a working group). The Task Force's charge was to study and make

recommendations for strategies to recruit and induct highly qualified teachers, provide quality working conditions and support for teachers' continued growth, ensure all students equitable access to effective teachers, and examine the potential of pay for performance in Hill ISD. The Task Force was comprised primarily of representatives from the education sector, including classroom teachers, principals, district human resources representatives, representatives from four area teachers and administrators associations (including the president of the main association in the district, who was also on the Steering Committee)[10], and two representatives from the district advisory committee (a group of parents and community representatives that provided feedback to the district on a range of policy issues). The Task Force was facilitated by a researcher from a local university.

The Task Force reported to the Board of Trustees in June of 2005 on district recruitment and compensation targets, current recruitment and retention efforts, recruitment and retention in high-needs schools, and pay for performance initiatives. The Board requested they continue their work in developing a comprehensive strategy to recruit and retain effective teachers, and to staff high-needs schools.

Also in 2005, Hill ISD began negotiating a salary agreement with the teachers association that had consultation rights with the district (the president of which was on the Teacher Compensation and Support Task Force). At the end of that year, they reached a two-year agreement (2006-2007 through 2007-2008) that, among other things, increased teacher salaries by 10.5% by the end of 2007-2008 (7.5% in first year; 3% in

the second). In exchange, the association agreed to support a proposal to voters to increase the Maintenance and Operations property tax rate for 2006-2007 by four cents to pay for the salary increases. One cent of that rate (approximately $4.3 million) would be dedicated for the incentive pay program being developed by the Task Force. The association also agreed to support the district's application for a DATE grant in 2007. If the application was approved, the salary increase for 2007-2008 would be increased to 4%. The salary agreement is included in Appendix D.

Creation of Hill ISD's Performance Pay Program.

In December of 2006, the Task Force presented its plan for a comprehensive performance pay plan to the Board of Trustees. They had spent two years examining several broad issues and policy proposals related to teacher quality, including teachers' contribution to student achievement, teacher recruitment and retention, and performance pay. They also met with representatives from Denver Public Schools to learn about ProComp, which had just been implemented. ProComp had been developed and piloted collaboratively by the district and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association. DPS subsequently gained approval from voters for a tax increase to fund the program permanently. Denver's success in developing the program and gaining voter approval for funding had sparked tremendous interest among policymakers in similar programs. TAP was also gaining in popularity among districts and state policymakers, adding to the burgeoning national interest in performance pay (Springer, 2009).

This nature of performance pay as an emerging national interest fit with other initiatives the Superintendent had been pursuing and promoting, such as high school reform, a policy initiative that was also receiving attention across the country due to its promotion by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The district's high school redesign program was being funded by the foundation, and they were also receiving assistance from the School Redesign Network at Stanford University, lending national perspectives to the project.

The plan the Task Force presented contained the program elements largely as they existed three years later at the time of this study's data collection. It included measures of student growth that were tied to incentives for teachers and principals, a mentoring program for novice teachers in their first three years of teaching, recruitment stipends for novice teachers in high-needs schools, retention stipends for all teachers in high-needs schools, and stipends for professional development. The Task Force recommended hiring an outside consultant to develop the specifics of the program.

They also recommended the creation of a steering committee to guide and oversee the consultant's work. The Teacher Compensation and Support Task Force would remain in place as an advisory group to facilitate communication between the Steering Committee and stakeholders, including teachers and school administrators, and to review draft policies, communications, and implementation strategies. The Steering Committee was proposed to include five co-chairs. These included two former officers of the Chamber of Commerce (one of whom had been president during development of the

Chamber's regional economic strategy), the president of the consulting teachers association, a parent representative to the District Advisory Council, and the district's Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources Development and Information Systems. Other members included two teachers, a principal, the university researcher who had facilitated the Task Force, the district's Director of State and Federal Accountability, and a Special Assistant to the Superintendent (who later became the program director).

The Task Force's plan was approved by the Board of Trustees, and work on developing the program for implementation began in earnest in January of 2007. During the spring of 2007, the Steering Committee hired two consultants (one was the same firm that consulted with Denver Public Schools on ProComp) and began developing program guidelines, processes, and requirements. They decided, due the expense of the program and skepticism held about it among some teachers and principals, to pilot it in nine schools beginning in the 2007-2008 school year.[11] Principals and teacher leaders from 18 selected schools were presented with information about the program in the spring of 2007. The criteria the committee used to select schools included academic performance, teacher turnover, stable principal leadership, and student demographics. Schools were selected to create a group that varied on the academic performance, turnover, and student demographic criteria. Schools with high proportions of English language learners, special education students, and economically disadvantaged students were especially targeted and made up the majority of selected schools. It should be noted that these criteria were

loose guidelines, not specific requirements. School selection was ultimately at the discretion of the Steering Committee. The requirements are included in Appendix E.

Of the 18 schools identified, nine were later formally invited by the Steering Committee to participate in the pilot. These schools were given information about the program just before the beginning of the school year and were asked to conduct elections among faculty to decide whether to participate. The Steering Committee established a threshold of 75% of teachers voting in favor in order for a school to be approved to participate. All nine schools voted in favor of participating. At five of the nine schools, more than 90% of teachers voted to participate. At three schools, more than 80% of teachers voted to participate. The remaining school barely met the threshold with 78% voting to participate. The following year, two more schools entered the program. In 2009-2010, an additional five schools participated and one of the original schools dropped out of the program, bringing the total number of schools to 15. This represented about 15% of all schools in the district. In 2007, the pilot phase was expected to conclude in 2008-2009. By 2008, however, the Steering Committee had extended the pilot phase through 2010-2011.

Structure of the Program.

The structure of Hill ISD's performance pay program was similar to ProComp, which was clearly a source of inspiration for the Task Force and Steering Committee. In communications to teachers, evaluation reports, and presentations to the Board of Trustees and other audiences, the program was cast as a combination of supports and

rewards. The perspective communicated by the Steering Committee was that financial incentives alone were unlikely to change teachers' behaviors because "most teachers already work diligently and experience a variety of reasons to be motivated to help their students learn (e.g., school accountability ratings and self-motivation)" (see note 10). Thus, the financial bonuses in the program were structured less like incentives meant to directly change behavior and more like rewards intended to recognize excellence. In fact, the Steering Committee's stated goals claimed that the program aimed to recruit, retain, and *recognize* outstanding teachers (see Appendix F; emphasis added).

Like ProComp, the program offered incentives to recruit and retain teachers; for professional development and mentoring; and for student performance. Specifically, it provided stipends in varying amounts for attainment of objectives in three areas: Student Growth, Professional Growth, and Recruitment and Retention at Highest Needs Schools. The Student Growth component included School-Wide TAKS Growth based on the Comparable Improvement indicator of the Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS)[12] and teacher-developed Student Learning Objectives, which applied to individual teachers. The Professional Growth component included participation in Take One!®, a program developed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), in which teachers developed and submitted one portfolio for one certificate area for NBPTS certification. Passing scores could count toward full NBPTS certification. This component also included a novice teacher mentoring program for teachers who were in their first through third years of teaching. The Recruitment and Retention component

provided stipends for teachers who were new to pilot schools and who returned to those schools.

Schools in the program were classified as Higher Needs, Highest Needs, or not high needs. Higher Needs schools were those that fell within the top half of schools in the district in proportions of economically disadvantaged, special education, and English language learner students; Highest Needs schools fell within the top third in these areas. Stipend amounts and eligibility for awards varied among these groups of schools. As of the 2009-2010 school year, 13 schools were classified as Highest Needs, three were Higher Needs, and one was not high needs. Table 4.1 presents the program components along with their associated stipends.

Table 4.1. Hill ISD Performance Pay Program Components

Program Element	Student Growth		Professional Growth		Recruitment & Retention	
	Student Learning Objectives	**School-Wide TAKS Growth**	**Take One!®**	**Novice Teacher Mentoring**	**New to School Stipend**	**Retention Stipend**
Description	Teachers develop two learning objectives	School achieves Quartile 1 Comparable Improvement in Reading and Math	Teachers complete one of ten portfolios required for National Board Certification	Mentors work full-time with cohort of novice teachers (in first three years of teaching)	New teacher and principal hires to school	Teacher and principal retention at school
Stipend Amount: Not High Needs Schools	Principals: $3,000 Teachers: $1,000 per objective	Principals: $4,000 Reading $4,000 Math Teachers: $2,000 Reading $2,000 Math	$395 fee waived Submission: $200 Passing Score: $200	Only applicable to Higher and Highest Needs schools	Only applicable to Highest Needs schools	Only applicable to Higher and Highest Needs schools
Stipend Amount: Higher Needs Schools	Principals: $3,000 Teachers: $1,000 per objective	Principals: $4,000 Reading $4,000 Math Teachers: $2,000 Reading $2,000 Math	$395 fee waived Submission: $200 Passing Score: $200	Service: $3,000 Satisfactory evaluation: $2,000 $1,000 per subject for school-wide TAKS growth	Only applicable to Highest Needs schools	Principals and teachers with 2 or more years tenure at school: $1,500
Stipend Amount: Highest Needs Schools	Principals: $4,500 Teachers: $1,000 per objective	Principals: $4,000 Reading $4,000 Math Teachers: $2,000 Reading $2,000 Math	$395 fee waived Submission: $200 Passing Score: $200	Service: $3,000 Satisfactory evaluation: $2,000 $2,000 per subject for school-wide TAKS growth	Teachers in first three years of tenure at school: $1,000	Principals: $3,000 Teachers with 4 or more years tenure at school: $3,000

Note. Table derived from documents retrieved from Hill ISD website.

Within the program, "teachers" included not only classroom teachers, but also instructional specialists, librarians, counselors, and project advance facilitators. Counselors and facilitators were made eligible beginning in the 2009-2010 school year. Assistant principals were eligible for the same stipends as teachers. Other administrative staff, paraprofessionals, custodial staff, and food service staff were not eligible to participate.

Teachers at Highest Needs schools could receive between $6,400 and $9,400 (depending on experience and tenure at the school) if they achieved all student growth objectives and successfully participated in Take One!® (they could receive up to $9,000 in additional stipends for serving as mentors); teachers at Higher Needs schools could receive between $6,400 and $7,900, with up to $7,000 in additional stipends for serving as mentors; teachers at Not High Needs schools could receive $6,400.

It is important to note that principals also received awards based on the performance of their teachers. Principals at Highest Needs schools could receive up to $14,400 (principals may participate in Take One!®); principals at Higher Needs schools could receive between $12,900 and $14,400. Principals in schools not classified as Higher Needs or Highest Needs could receive $11,400. Principals received stipends for the Student Learning Objective element whether or not teachers achieved objectives to compensate them for their efforts in working with teachers to develop objectives and monitoring teachers' progress.

Program Funding and Funding Requirements.

Hill ISD's performance pay program was funded through a number of sources. Upon authorizing the pilot to begin in 2006, the Board of Trustees dedicated approximately $4.3 million per year in Maintenance and Operations tax funds to the program. School finance reforms emanating from the Texas Legislature played a key role in this funding because those changes enabled the district to raise its tax rate from $1.00 per $100 of property value to $1.04. One cent of this increase, fixed at the 2006-2007 fiscal year value, was dedicated to the performance pay program. The remainder was used to fund salary and benefits increases that had been agreed upon in 2005. However, this was not enough to support more than the original nine schools. In 2008, the district applied for and received a $5.5 million grant from the statewide DATE program. These funds were used for the 2008-2009 school year. They also received $1 million over two years from the statewide Beginning Teacher Induction program to supplement local funds for the mentoring component.

The DATE program separates grant funds into two categories, Part I and Part II. Part I funds make up at least 60% of each grant and must be used to provide awards to classroom teachers who meet performance criteria based on measures of student achievement. Part II funds make up no more than 40% of each grant and may be used for a variety of activities, including teacher recruitment and retention stipends, mentor or master teacher stipends, professional development, instructional data management systems, or performance awards for school administrators and other school staff.

Hill ISD used Part I funds for learning objective and school-wide TAKS growth stipends for teachers. Part II funds were used partly for student growth awards to principals, assistant principals, librarians, and instructional specialists. Part II funds were also used for recruitment and retention stipends, and for an assessment system that was used in the 2008-2009 school year (this assessment system is described below and in Chapter Seven). While DATE funds did not substantially alter the design of the program, they did come with other requirements that affected program implementation, particularly a requirement to redistribute unused funds to teachers who had already received performance stipends (also discussed further in Chapter 6).

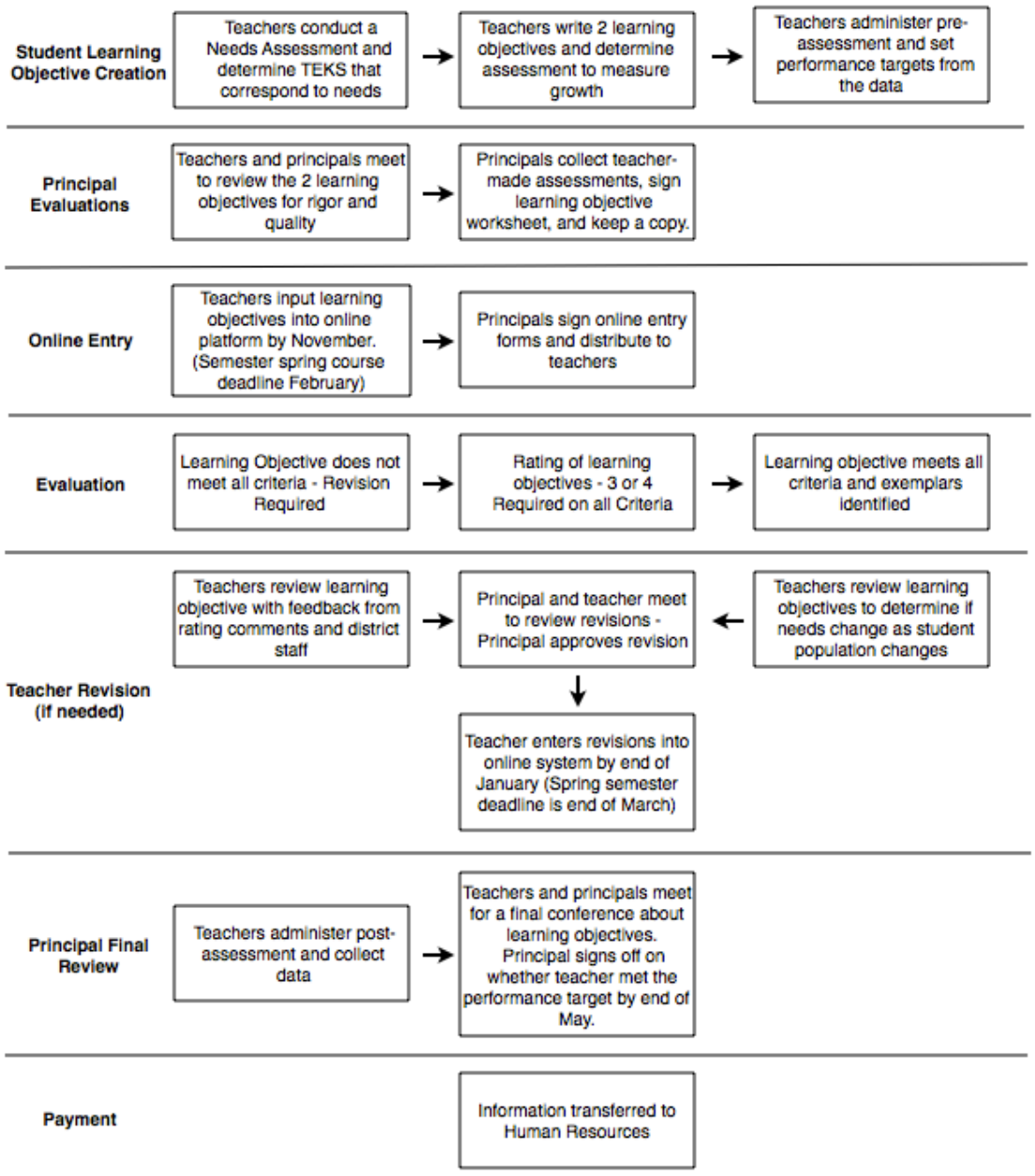
Key Processes and Changes.

To understand how teachers, district administrators, and the Steering Committee interpreted and responded to Hill ISD's performance pay program, it is necessary to understand the processes through which they experienced it. The program made a number of new demands on teachers and school administrators. It also resulted in a new department in the district central office with staff performing new and unique functions. In describing program processes, I will focus on those that emerged from my data as particularly salient or important in shaping sensemaking. These included the process of developing student learning objectives and a the addition of required assessments in the program's second year.[13]

Student Learning Objectives Process.

While the Student Learning Objectives component was not associated with the largest awards available to teachers (School-Wide TAKS Growth had the largest associated award at a possible $4,000 for teachers and $8,000 for principals), it was easily the most visible one to teachers, school administrators, and district central office staff. Developing learning objectives involved a complex process on their part. A flow chart of the process developed by the program office is displayed in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2. Student Learning Objective Process Flow Chart



Note. Figure derived from document retrieved from Hill ISD website.

First, teachers examined student achievement data in consultation with their principals and identified two learning objectives based on areas for growth. For each objective, the teacher had to then define: (1) the content area; (2) the grade level; (3) the rationale for selecting the objective; (4) the classroom or course population targeted; (5) the time period for which the objective applies (i.e., whole year or semester); (6) the assessment to be used to measure outcomes; (7) students' expected growth; (8) the curriculum standard, knowledge or skill being measured; (9) the strategies the teacher will use to meet the objective; and (10) any professional development that could assist the teacher in achieving the objective.

After the learning objectives were approved by principals, teachers submitted them to the district central office through an online system. Each objective was then reviewed by central office staff for the appropriateness of the content area in relation to student needs, completeness of the objective, cohesion among objective elements, and the rigor of assessments to be used and performance expectations set. Teachers were given opportunities to revise objectives, if needed. This process took place during September and October. At the beginning of the spring semester, teachers were required to submit to the central office, by a predetermined deadline, a roster of students who would be assessed for each objective. In elementary schools, students were administered pretests in October and November and posttests in May (just after TAKS administrations in April).

Along with the multiple steps required to develop, submit, and implement student learning objectives, teachers, principals, and district administrators had to ensure that

they might numerous criteria in multiple areas. For each piece of information teachers had to provide, there were several criteria district administrators used to evaluate them. Presumably, principals also used these criteria in approving their teachers' objectives. The program office's guidelines for learning objectives and objectives disseminated as examples are included in Appendix G. Meeting these criteria entailed analyzing student performance data, examining school improvement plans and state standards, evaluating assessments, planning instructional and professional development activities, and identifying other potential resources for achieving the objective. To help teachers and principals navigate these criteria and the process of developing objectives, the program office conducted workshops and one-on-one trainings at schools, posted videos detailing the process on their website, provided written materials, and communicated frequently with principals on procedures and deadlines.

Like other elements of the program, the learning objectives component underwent some changes after the program began. One of the most significant changes was that teachers were given the option of defining so-called tiered objectives in Year Two. This allowed them to differentiate performance expectations for students based on their pretest performance. Tiered objectives enabled teachers to differentiate expectations for students based on their pretest performance levels. As will be described in the discussion of teachers' experiences with the program, this change was important in maintaining some teachers' sense of efficacy about the program and in improving their attitudes about the fairness of the learning objectives.

Required Assessments in Year Two.

In the first year of the program, teachers were given several options in identifying measures to use for learning objectives. They could use standardized tests already in use, such as TAKS or district benchmark assessments (which include beginning-of-year, middle-of-year and end-of-year assessments aligned to state standards for each subject and grade level). They could also opt to use teacher-made assessments, provided they were approved by both their principals and the district central office.

During the first year of the program, the Steering Committee and some stakeholders became concerned that teacher-made assessments did not accurately measure growth and lacked rigor .[14] They were also concerned that teacher-made assessments might not appear credible to outside stakeholders, such as parents and the business community (E. Fuller, personal communication, September 2, 2010). To address these concerns, the district contracted with Tests for Higher Standards, a private test development company to create pretests and posttests aligned with state standards that could be used to measure growth during the school year. They ultimately created 82 tests, as well as an item bank that teachers could use to create their own customized assessments. The assessments were disseminated to teachers, scored, and reported by way of a student data management system provided by D2 Data Driven Software Corporation. The assessments, as well as the data management system, became referred to by teachers and principals simply as "D2."

In the program's second year (2008-2009), all teachers of core subjects (mathematics, reading, science, and social studies) in grades 3 through 11 were required to use the D2 assessments or item bank in at least one of their learning objectives. Further, that objective had to address a predefined student learning need as identified through school and district needs assessments conducted by the district. This was a significant departure from the first year, when teachers were responsible for identifying student learning needs with their principals.

Teachers throughout the pilot schools reported a number of difficulties and dissatisfaction with the D2 assessments and system . Some encountered technical difficulties using the data management system, particularly with scanning and uploading completed tests. Many third through fifth grade teachers also reported that the assessments were not well aligned to the state curriculum standards in mathematics. An evaluation of program outcomes in Year Two indeed found that teachers were less likely to achieve learning objectives measured by D2 assessments than to achieve learning objectives measured by other assessments, either standardized or teacher-made . Teachers also reported feeling frustrated that they were not able to use teacher-made assessments that they had created in the first year, and that they were disappointed that the district had changed the program to require a particular assessment (see note 10).

By the end of the 2008-2009 school year, the Steering Committee had decided to remove the requirement to use the D2 assessments, although they remained available to teachers to include in learning objectives. However, as the experiences of teachers at

McCoy Elementary will later demonstrate, this experiment in restricting teachers' autonomy in the learning objectives process resulted in a loss of trust among some teachers in the program and the policymakers directing it.

Discussion

Hill ISD created and enacted its performance pay program in a context of growing interest among state policymakers in these policies and an expanding field of such programs nationwide. The Superintendent at the time had also demonstrated interest in other systemic reforms and had sought resources and ideas for initiatives outside the district's region. These interests, along with the Chamber of Commerce's activities in the education community and the backdrop of strategic planning and salary negotiations, created the setting in which the district initiated performance pay.

Their relatively early entry into the performance pay field enabled the district to take considerable time in crafting its program and garnering support for it among stakeholders. Had they embarked on developing the initiative two years later, in 2006, the district would have been pressed to develop a program in time to apply for state funds. They would also likely have met with some resistance to the idea among teachers since the new state programs attracted considerable attention toward performance pay at the time.

Despite the deliberateness with which Hill ISD pursued its performance pay program, and their careful inclusion of stakeholders, the program remained rather hidden from many teachers in the district. All but one of the teachers interviewed for this study

had little or no knowledge of the Task Force on Teacher Support and Compensation or the Steering Committee. Most of them had not known about the program at all until they were approached by their principals about participating in it. They had had limited experience with any kind of performance pay before participating in this program (Thompson Elementary had participated in the TEEG program for two years just before entering the Hill ISD program; McCoy Elementary teachers had had no experience with performance pay). The school administrators interviewed also had little experience with performance pay and knew little about the Hill ISD program until they were invited to participate.

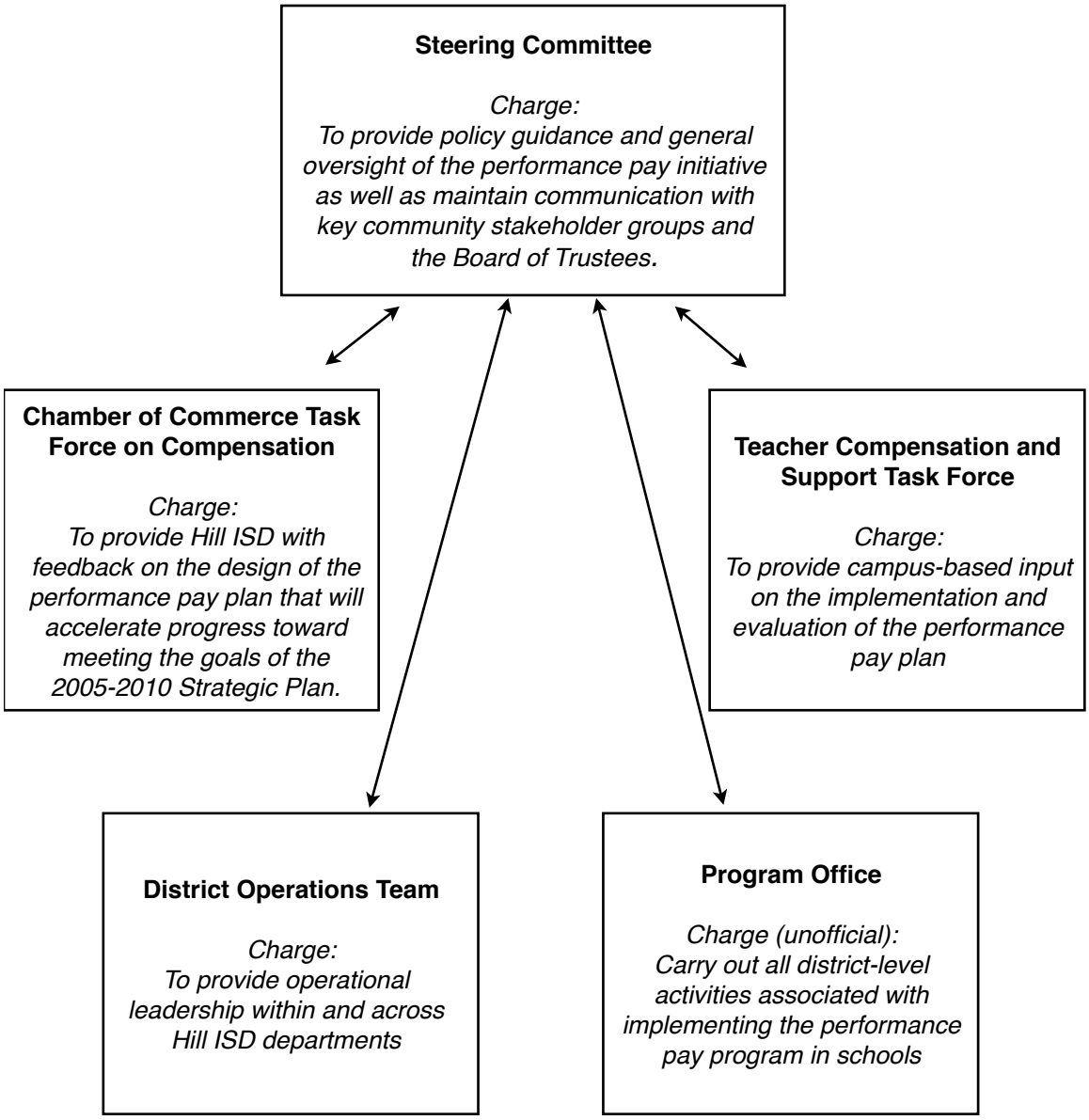
Thus, the teachers and school administrators charged with acting on the program through implementing student learning objectives in their classrooms, engaging in mentoring, and participating in professional development entered into these activities with relatively fresh eyes, having little prior knowledge about the program or performance pay policies to inform their interpretations. This was also the case for the Steering Committee and the district central office staff. Although they were more familiar with performance pay than most teachers and school administrators, they had never designed or implemented such a program before. Everyone involved was, in a sense, learning on the job. As will be described in the next few chapters, these actors at each level in the system - schools, district central office, and policymakers - took on perspectives about the program that diverged in a number of ways, resulting in sometimes conflicting ideas about its purpose, goals, and potential to induce change. These different

perspectives led to different sets of expectations for teachers' work, which were not always understood. In response, teachers and school administrators adapted the program to their own goals and existing practices.

Chapter 5: Sensemaking on the Steering Committee

As discussed in Chapter Four, the Steering Committee was one of the driving forces in the development of Hill ISD's performance pay program. Although the Task Force on Teacher Compensation and Support spent two years developing the basic structure of the program, the Steering Committee was responsible for its implementation and evaluation. It established processes and requirements, which were carried out by the program office. Once established, the Steering Committee took on the responsibility of guiding and overseeing the program, while the Task Force became an advisory group. Figure 5.1 shows the organizational chart for the program. This figure is based on a document provided to the Board of Trustees by the Steering Committee in 2008.

Figure 5.1. Hill ISD Performance Pay Program Organizational Chart



Note. Figure derived from document retrieved from Hill ISD website.

Sensemaking about the program among the Steering Committee members interviewed was characterized by a division between the perspectives of business interests and those of education professionals. Business interests on the committee saw it as a means of motivating teachers and altering the attitudes and skills of the teacher workforce. District administration and the teachers association, for somewhat different reasons, viewed it as an opportunity to provide needed instructional support to teachers and to recognize teachers' work.

The administration and the teachers association were uniquely aligned in their goals for the performance pay in the district, and their views came to dominate decisions about program design and implementation. The business perspective remained relevant, though, resulting in sometimes conflicting visions of the program's goals, purposes, and theory of action. These differing perspectives were evident in the program's design, which included both financial incentives and instructional supports. Over time, however, the program moved away from its emphasis on financial awards toward greater reliance on supports to create improvements in teaching and student achievement. Yet, because this "evolution...from a pay to a teaching and learning initiative" (in the words of the program's director) was not universally supported (at least not enthusiastically) by all members of the Steering Committee, the program included compensation as well as supports. It was able to satisfy all the interests on the committee, but also increased the complexity of the program provided to teachers to incorporate into their practice.

Structure of the Steering Committee

Membership on the Steering Committee largely mirrored that of the Task Force, yet there were some notable differences between the two groups. The Task Force had had only one representative from the business community. Two of the Steering Committee's co-chairs were business representatives. Both were former officers of the Chamber of Commerce, which had created its own advisory task force in support of the performance pay program. One of the representatives had been the Chair of the Chamber of Commerce when it created its regional education initiative. So, the business community had a greater voice on the Steering Committee than it had had on the Task Force. The Steering Committee also included a Special Assistant to the Superintendent (who later became the Program Director), who had been hired to manage the performance pay program. He had joined the Task Force in 2006, and had presented their proposed program, along with the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources and Information Systems, to the Board of Trustees.

Although the number of members on the Steering Committee vacillated, all but a few individuals remained on it throughout the course of the program. Table 5.1 describes the membership on the Steering Committee in 2007, 2008, and 2010.

Table 5.1. Steering Committee Membership, 2007-2010

Member	2007	2008	2010
Co-Chair: Former Chair, Chamber of Commerce (1)*	X	X	X
Co-Chair: Parent Representative, District Advisory Committee (1)*	X	X	X
Co-Chair: President, Teachers Association (1)*	X	X	X
Co-Chair: Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources and Information Systems (1)*	X	X	X
Co-Chair: President of Area Urban League and Former Vice President of Education for Chamber of Commerce (1)*	X	X	X
Special Assistant to Superintendent/ Program Director (1)*	X	X	X
University Researcher (1)*	X	X	X
Teachers Association Representatives*	0	1	1
Principals*	1	3	2
Teachers**	2	5	4
Other District Staff	1	1 (Superintendent)	1*** (in program office)
Total Members	11	17	15

* Same individual in all years.
** One individual in 2005 not a member in other years. All other members same in all years.
*** Individual had been a member as a principal prior to joining as a district staff member.

As can be seen in this table, the committee became more tilted toward educators over time. The number of teachers increased to five and the number of principals to three in the program's second year. Their numbers decreased slightly in the third year, but,

along with the teachers association representatives and district representatives, 12 of the 15 members in 2010 were education professionals. By contrast, only two members represented the business community. It should be noted that, while the committee included teachers and principals, the core members were the co-chairs and the program director, as confirmed by all the Steering Committee members interviewed as well as the university researcher. These were the members who had the most influence on the committee and were the most involved in its decision making.

To reflect the Steering Committee's membership, I interviewed one of the business representatives, the president of the teachers association, and the district program director. These individuals were recommended as participants by the university researcher on the committee, who was familiar with the program and the workings of the Steering Committee and was able to identify individuals who had both extensive knowledge of the program's development and represented the primary perspectives on the committee. The program director also recommended the teachers association president and the business representative as potential interviewees.

The business representative (referred to here as Business Representative) was a banking executive who was also a former chair of the Chamber of Commerce. He oversaw development of the Chamber's regional economic development strategy that included public education goals and initiatives. He had been involved in past Hill ISD initiatives and expressed an interest in charter schools and in improving low-income schools. He was also a trustee of a local historically Black university.

The president of the teachers association (referred to here as Teachers Association President) had been a bilingual teacher in Hill ISD. After earning a Master of Public Administration, he joined the teachers association, eventually becoming its president. He had held that position for 15 years and had extensive experience working with the Hill ISD administration.

Finally, the program director (referred to here as Program Director) came to Hill ISD in 2006 to serve as a Special Assistant to the Superintendent as part of a residency for a doctoral program in educational administration at a nationally prestigious university. He stayed on at the district and eventually became director of the office overseeing the performance pay program. Before coming to Hill ISD, he had worked as a policy advisor at the National Board for Teacher Certification, and had been a White House Fellow participating in the development of No Child Left Behind. He was also a Board-certified teacher and had been named Teacher of the Year in his home state (outside of Texas).

Sensemaking on the Steering Committee

The Steering Committee was unique in Hill ISD. No other similar committee of external stakeholders had been formed in the district to develop and oversee an initiative. Initiatives were typically designed and overseen solely by district administration. In creating the Steering Committee (as well as the Task Force that preceded it), the Superintendent had likely been influenced by the process used to develop ProComp, in which a similar committee of teachers, district administrators, teachers union representatives, and business representatives had been employed successfully. Despite

their unique task and the disparate interests and voices they represented, the Steering Committee's work proceeded quite smoothly. All three committee members interviewed for this study commented that the collaboration within the Steering Committee had made the program more effective than it would have been otherwise, and was a point of pride for them.

There were disagreements, however. Most notably, the Chamber of Commerce Task Force on Compensation pressed the Steering Committee to set specific performance targets for the pilot phase to provide clear indicators of its effectiveness. District staff, however, thought that it would be difficult to establish valid benchmarks without historical data on program components (i.e., baseline performance on achievement of student learning objectives). Ultimately, some implementation, rather than outcome, targets were established (see note 10). The Steering Committee also committed to considerable evaluation of the program by internal and external evaluators. Additionally, the teachers association was initially resistant to including the school-wide TAKS growth component, but eventually agreed, according to the Teachers Association President, based on their expectation that this measure would be found to be less effective in changing teachers' behaviors and improving student achievement than the student learning objectives component. If evaluations of the program found this to be the case, the association would be well positioned to recommend removing incentives for school-wide TAKS growth from the program.

Within this context, I interviewed the Business Representative, the Teachers Association President, and the Program Director about their perspectives on the performance pay program and the Steering Committee's work in implementing it. Their responses fell into three categories: the purpose and goals of the program, the program's theory of action, and program successes and challenges. These categories reflect the Steering Committee's role as program designers and decision makers, which resulted in a broad view of the program across multiple years and schools.

These respondents held different opinions and perspectives about the program's intentions and theory of action. The Business Representative saw performance pay as a tool to directly motivate teachers' behavior and alter characteristics of the teacher workforce in the district. The Program Director and Teachers Association President held similar views that the purpose of the program was to professionalize teaching and provide supports to teachers to improve instruction. These two perspectives were both reflected in the program's design, although those of the Program Director and Teachers Association President were predominant.

Program Purpose and Goals.

While all three Steering Committee members acknowledged that the primary goal of Hill ISD's performance pay program was to improve student achievement, two distinct perspectives on the purpose of performance pay in achieving this goal emerged among the respondents. The first, expressed most fully by the Business Representative, was to improve teacher quality. The second, expressed by the Teachers Association President

and the Program Director, was to increase supports and professional authority for teachers. Both of these perspectives were evident in the program's structure, which incorporated both incentives and supports. While their coexistence did not appear to create conflict among the Steering Committee, it did result in mixed messages to school practitioners about the program's focus.

The Business Representative viewed Hill ISD's program as not only a new initiative, but, more importantly, as a cultural shift in schooling toward a more businesslike mindset. The need for performance pay in schools emanated, for him, from a lack of capacity among teachers and from weaknesses in the way districts not only compensate, but also recruit teachers. He commented,

> Teachers came into the profession over the last 100 years for lots of reasons, but one of them wasn't, for the most part, how can I measure my students at the beginning of the semester and move their competency to a predetermined increase? Very few teachers entered the profession for that reason because school districts, by and large, don't measure that way… Our recruitment of teachers, anybody will agree, says here's the high bar and here's who we'll recruit, and [the recruits are] all down here, so let's lower the bar.

The logic expressed here was that there were many teachers who did not have either the inclination or the ability to set and work toward specified goals for student learning. Because these teachers made up a large proportion of the teacher labor pool, districts had either not been able to or had not wanted to recruit teachers who could and would teach in a more goal-oriented manner. To this point, he distinguished between "student achievement" and "teaching," explaining the difference as working toward a goal versus implementing lessons without regard to objectives. He explained, "They

teach whatever they felt like today, as opposed to [saying], 'The day's beginning and this is what I have to accomplish today.'"

These views about the need for performance pay in Hill ISD contrasted with those expressed by the Teachers Association President and district Program Director. The Teachers Association President elected to become involved with the program so that the association could shape it to fit their needs and interests, one of which was to increase teacher compensation. Not only did the program offer an opportunity to directly increase some teachers' pay, it was also seen as a way to lay the groundwork for broader pay increases in the future. As he remarked,

> If we can demonstrate that spending money on teachers in a certain way, whether it's paying them more, or training them better, or supporting them in new ways, leads to higher student performance, then we [can] go out and make that argument [to the community]. [We can] say, 'It's worth raising the property tax. It's worth taking the next $10,000,000 and putting it into this.' Because we've already shown that these kinds of investments pay.

The association also hoped to bring about systemic changes in the way district administration worked with teachers. In his view, the district, mainly through the curriculum and instruction department, had become too focused on standardizing lessons and interventions, eroding teachers' professional discretion. He commented,

> They really tried hard to set up these systems that would identify underperformance and give some kind of standard response rather than investing in the quality of the teacher so [that] the teacher picked up on [students who were] struggling and got in there and did something about it.

For him, the performance pay program, particularly the student learning objectives component, presented an opportunity to provide teachers more authority over their instruction. As he explained,

> Our members complain bitterly when they're at schools that are struggling and their professional autonomy is taken away from them. The school district has these instructional people, and they call [teachers] downtown and they send [their staff] out to the school. And they hand out the lesson plans and they hand out the Friday assessment. And they say, "[You're] a bad school. And you're a bad teacher. So somebody else is going to do your thinking for you. And this is what you're going to do." Boy, teachers really hate that. So that's one way to think about [improving student achievement]. The other way is to say, "Here's your kids. Here's your data. You need to analyze it. You need to set goals. They need to be clear and transparent. They need to be negotiated with your principal. But *you're* going to get the job done. You're the teacher here, the expert, the professional. And we're here to help you." Boy, that's a whole different approach. So that's part of what was in it for us. It was getting out of this top-down, punishment approach that the district had been using.

The Program Director expressed a similar "hidden agenda" (in his words) to "professionalize the work of teaching." He explained,

> [T]his is complex work that teachers engage in. Those student learning objectives, as an example, are a way to highlight the thinking, the deep thinking and measurement and interventions that teachers are involved with every single day that I think many in the public are just not aware. So I do want to raise perceptions of the work of teaching, which does mean higher pay. But it also means different expectations for being transparent in that work as well.

His last point about different expectations was shared by the Business Representative and, to a somewhat lesser extent, by the Teachers Association President. All three agreed that teachers' compensation should be higher, but the Program Director and the Business Representative emphasized the notion of tying increased compensation

to increased expectations for performance. The Teachers Association President did not express disagreement with this view, but rather saw demonstrations of improved performance as a means to agitate for increased compensation. In other words, his goal was to increase compensation, whereas the goal of the Business Representative was to increase performance. The Program Director shared both of these goals, but wanted increased compensation to be coupled with higher expectations for performance.

These differing opinions about the purpose of the performance pay program led to different aspirations for its effects on teachers and schools. The Business Representative's intentions to change teacher recruitment and selection practices and criteria led him to hope for fundamental changes in the Hill ISD teacher workforce. He commented,

> If [this program] is successful, one could predict there will be at least 50% turnover in the teacher group from when we started. Remember, the kinds of people who entered the profession entered, not for the wrong reasons, but for different reasons than being held accountable semester by semester with pre-approved goals. It isn't top-down, but it isn't teachers close the door and you're subject to whatever teaching they feel like that day. Good teachers [are] internally driven. Well, we don't have that many like that. Unfortunately, that will mean, I hope, if we do it correctly, a lot of selecting out.

It is important to note that he did not express a desire to terminate large numbers of teachers. In fact, he later stated the opposite. Rather, he expected that the program would lead to a cultural shift in expectations for instruction and performance that would prompt many teachers to leave the district of their own accord.

The Teachers Association President's goals centered on creating a more teacher-centered environment in the district and improving teachers' working conditions, particularly in low-income schools. He explained,

> [I'd like to see] this become the way we do business, and that this kind of intense support and recognition lead to us not having schools, especially on the East side of the city, where turnover is a given. That this be the driver for a new way to provide professional development that is very teacher-directed. Where every year, the teacher sits down and does an analysis, maybe in conversation with the principal. What am I focusing on this year? What are the skills I'm trying to build? What are the challenges that I've dealt with or that I'm going to deal with with the kids I'm working with? And as teachers do that and demonstrate it in the classroom, they're able to earn more money for it. So that the teacher who stays in the classroom has all these different ways, as they demonstrate their effectiveness, of being paid more.

He also expressed a goal for his association to continue to build its influence in the district through the program's focus on sending resources for professional development and technical assistance to schools rather than administering them at the central office. In his view, this was not only a best practice for supporting teachers, it was beneficial to his association and its members. He noted,

> I see this as starting to help the district reshape how it uses its resources. That's good for us. That's good for the union. Because we don't want it top-heavy. And my members want leadership opportunities. And they want opportunities to make money, too, doing that.

The Program Director discussed similar goals for the program to result in larger systemic changes in the district. He wanted the human capital perspectives that had informed performance pay in Hill ISD to be integrated into other district practices to

create more coherence between instructional programs, human resources, and other district functions. He commented,

> [Performance pay] can't stand on its own feet. It needs to be connected with all of our efforts to bring in high-quality teachers and administrators and support them to be successful and to give them the tools to be successful. So the linkages that are starting to occur across the district, I think, tell me that we're finally starting to understand some of these human capital notions that have existed and are becoming more apparent to all urban districts, or just school districts in general. So that sense of connectedness is, I'm excited to see that.

Program Theory of Action.

As with the purposes and goals of the program, the three respondents expressed different perspectives on how performance incentives could achieve those goals. The first, expressed by the Business Representative, was that of performance pay as a direct way of changing behavior and increasing teacher effectiveness. The second, expressed by both the Teachers Association President and the district Program Director, was that of performance pay as a means to obtain resources for instructional support programs. These differing perspectives led to different expectations for program outcomes and somewhat opposing ideas about what constituted appropriate and effective program activities.

The Business Representative had worked within incentive pay structures throughout his career in banking, and believed monetary awards tied to performance objectives could lead to behavioral changes that might not come about otherwise. His beliefs about the value of incentives reflected the economic theory of action of performance pay, which links monetary awards directly to behaviors. He commented,

> Incentive pay is getting people to do what they otherwise wouldn't do… Incentives, no matter what teachers will tell you, do drive behaviors. Everybody has the pressures of car repair, if not the next car, of college educations, of vacations, of… Everybody, their behavior can be channeled by the extent to which rewards are part of the system.

The Teachers Association President's responses indicated that, while he valued compensating teachers, he believed that the most effective means of improving instruction and student outcomes was to support teachers and give them more professional authority in the classroom. He noted,

> There are two schools of thought around teacher quality. There's the 'sort and separate' model. And then there's 'support and build capacity,' and we're definitely on the 'support and build' side. I believe it's that investment, being in the classrooms, supporting teachers, giving them data, training them. That's what will lead to better outcomes.

At the same time, he did not discount the importance of compensation. Rather, he believed, unlike the Business Representative, that monetary incentives alone were inadequate to fundamentally change behavior. As he explained,

> Teachers are already working hard. Believe me, they're working hard. They're working long hours. They're doing everything they can figure out how to do to get kids where they need to be. It isn't a matter of getting them to work harder. So just putting more money out there… It's got to be coupled with the support. I'm not saying there are no lazy teachers or no people who go home early. I'm saying that, in the main, they need more time. They need better working conditions. They need better training. And they need an administration whose orientation is [that] the classroom is where it's happening, [and asks], 'How do we support you?'

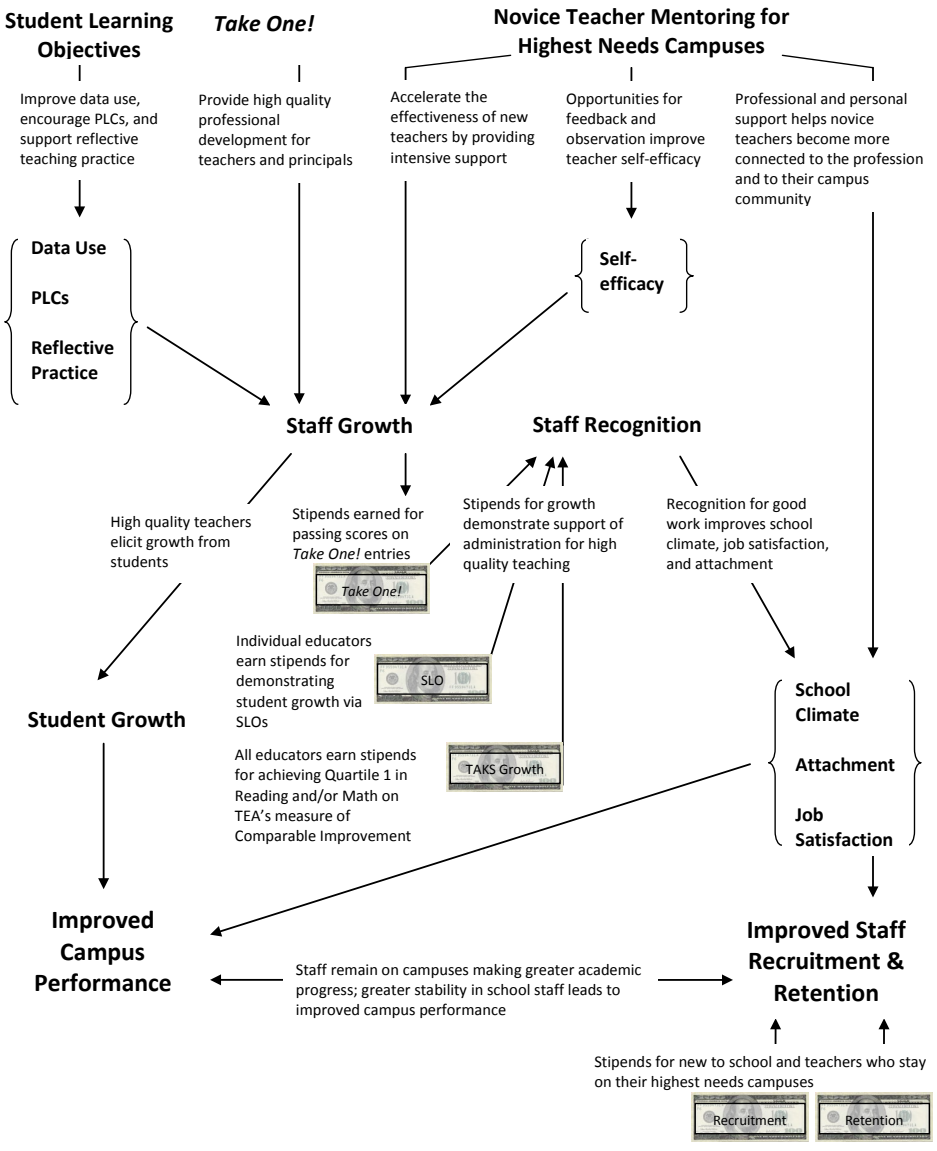
The Program Director agreed with the Teachers Association President, and was perhaps even more focused on instructional supports as the levers for behavioral changes. He stated, "This has to work as a teaching and learning initiative. It can't just be an extra

pay initiative." He discussed the way his perspective had changed during his work on the program from being focused on incentives to emphasizing instructional improvement. These changes resulted not only from directly engaging with performance pay, but also from studying theories of human capital and examining the experiences of Hill ISD and other districts. He explained,

> As we began to look at research into [human capital] questions, it was clear that this needed to be grounded in the teaching and learning environment that existed both in our district and on our campuses, and we were going to think about work that affected practice… As we looked at our own exit surveys about why teachers left or the data from around the country, it's a complex interplay between working conditions, such as the quality of a principal, the amount of support I receive, the class load I have. All those kinds of things are as important, if not more important, than what I actually get paid. But what I get paid matters too.

What was clear from the comments of the Program Director and the Teachers Association President was that they saw compensation and support as "inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing." However, they both viewed support as the more important factor in producing changes in instruction and teachers' behaviors. They tended to cast incentives as "recognition," awards intended to commend, but not necessarily induce, high performance. This perspective on the roles of incentives and supports is evident in the program's model of "hypothesized effects on school outcomes" (or theory of action), shown in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2. Published Theory of Action of the Hill ISD Performance Pay Program



Note. Figure derived from document retrieved from Hill ISD website.

This model was published in an internal evaluation report on implementation and outcomes in the program's second year. It was developed by Hill ISD internal evaluators for the report, in collaboration with program staff. Program staff reviewed the evaluators' model and proposed changes to it to reflect their views of the program's structure and goals. The evaluation report was also reviewed and approved by other district staff before release. Thus, while the model was not created wholly by the program office, it can nonetheless be interpreted as an accurate representation of the office's, and the district's, working theory of action for the program.

The model illustrates how the incentive components of the program are hypothesized to lead to the outcomes of improved school performance and improved staff recruitment and retention. In the model, each component is linked to one of these outcomes through behavioral changes (data use, professional learning communities, reflective practice) or affective changes (self efficacy, attachment, job satisfaction). There are two notable features. First, the components are decoupled from their associated monetary awards, except in the case of recruitment and retention stipends. The student learning objectives component is hypothesized to affect student growth and improved campus performance by encouraging particular instructional practices (data use, professional learning communities, and reflective practice), not by motivating teachers to perform better in order to receive monetary awards. Second, the awards themselves are linked not with the outcome of improved school performance, but with staff recognition, which is linked indirectly with improved school performance. Awards are similarly

described as demonstrations of the district administration's support for high-quality teaching, not as direct inducements for behaviors.

This model contrasts with the economic model of performance pay described in Chapter 3. In that model, motivation to earn financial incentives is the driver of behavioral changes and professional decision-making. Hill ISD's model presents a more complex view of change, with financial incentives taking on a less direct, more affective role in bringing about desired outcomes. It is consistent with the perspectives of the Teachers Association President and the Program Director, but differs markedly from the views expressed by the Business Representative.

Because he believed in a more direct relationship between incentive pay and behavioral changes, there were some parts of the program that he thought were inappropriate as part of a performance pay system. One of these was the mentoring component. He described it as something that "just should be part and parcel" of teachers' first three years in the classroom, but that did not fit within the definition of incentive pay. The Program Director and Teachers Association President did not make this distinction, viewing that type of teacher support as naturally and inextricably connected to compensation.

The Business Representative noted that he sometimes felt marginalized in the committee's work, which could help explain his frustrations. While his participation on the Steering Committee was voluntary and took place outside of his business commitments, others were able to devote more time and attention to developing and

overseeing the program. The Program Director, of course, worked full time on the program. The participation of the Teachers Association President was likewise directly related to his full-time job. One way in which these differences in attention were relevant was in attendance at monthly committee meetings. The Business Representative was not always able to attend, and sometimes returned to find that decisions had been made in his absence that he did not fully support. He described one example of such an occurrence and his opinion that the committee needed more "outside" perspectives,

> There [are] not enough outside eyes like mine on the Steering Committee. There's not enough balance. There were initially three [of us] (including the parent representative). One has not attended much, barely at all. Then me who attended initially all the time and then I got involved in business and I couldn't attend. Any culture change should have people on the committee who are familiar with it. So there should be three times as many outsiders as there are. That's a weakness that's cost us. One time I didn't go to a meeting and I went to the next meeting and I found out that counselors are now in the incentive plan. What? I missed a meeting. How did we get counselors? What is that? Well, their thinking is, 'We contribute to student achievement like teachers do.' Well, I understand that. To which I would say, from the outside, 'Why don't you go back in the classroom?' You were probably promoted because you were a good teacher. And we promoted you out of the classroom! That's backward. Why don't you go back and then you can be part of the incentive program? But no, I wasn't there, and so …

These comments reflect some misunderstandings about how school counselors are trained and placed. More importantly, though, they illuminate the ways in which the structure of the Steering Committee and its operations enabled the perspectives of the Program Director and the Teachers Association President to take on dominant roles in the design and implementation of the program. Through their regular attendance and

consistent level of involvement, they were able to shape the program to fit their interests and perspectives. Others who were not able to be as highly involved were at a disadvantage in doing so.

Program Successes and Challenges.

The three Steering Committee respondents were more consistent in their discussions of the program's successes and challenges. They all commented that the mentoring component had been particularly well-received by teachers and that they anticipated it would have positive effects on instruction and student outcomes. They also all noted that the collaboration among stakeholders to develop and guide the program had many positive effects both within and outside the program. The Steering Committee was considered a model for policymaking that they would all like to see replicated in other district initiatives.

In terms of challenges, they all mentioned program funding as a concern (the Business Representative, a former banking executive, was especially emphatic about his concerns in this area). The allotment that had been approved by the Board of Trustees did not provide enough funds to expand the program much beyond the 15 schools participating. The district was preparing to apply for a federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant to expand the program to more schools in its fourth year. Without these funds, expansion would not be possible. They were also currently relying on grants from the DATE and Beginning Teacher Induction programs, whose funds were determined by the Texas Legislature. The vulnerability of their funding was quite apparent to them. As the

Business Representative noted, “We’re spending a lot of time trying to figure out if we don’t get funding, do we proceed? The school board has never said, ‘Continue.’ So we’re waiting to hear.”

The interviewees also understood that they needed to be able to demonstrate positive and substantial effects on student outcomes to gain further commitments from the Board of Trustees and to ultimately propose a tax increase to voters to provide more permanent funding. To that end, they all spoke about the difficulty of measuring program outcomes, whether it was separating program effects from other factors or measuring student growth adequately for each component. As the Teachers Association President commented,

> I think after four years, there’ll be some hard conversations about is this working? How do we know it’s working? Does it work? It’s hard to separate out factors within schools. What contributed to this? It’s going to be hard to say unequivocally, ‘Yes! This is a wonderful thing.” But if we see over a three or four year period the arrows are pointing in the right direction, then it’s a matter of is it enough of a gain? Is it significant enough that we want to keep doing this? What [else] could we be doing with this money?

There were some differences between respondents, namely in the challenges they discussed. The Program Director and the Teachers Association President both discussed challenges in aligning program activities with other district programs. In particular, they saw the benchmark assessments used by the district to measure progress toward passing TAKS as lacking in relevance to student learning objectives. This issue was not raised by the Business Representative. Such differences in emphasis may have been related to the roles each respondent held within the program and outside the Steering Committee.

Assessment issues, for example, often came up among the Program Director's staff in the course of approving learning objectives. He and the Teachers Association President had also recently been placed on a districtwide committee to examine the district's assessment system, so they were engaging in discussions about the adequacy of assessments in venues outside the program. The Business Representative, on the other hand, did not have these experiences and did not work in or with the district where he would have other opportunities to think about such issues.

Discussion

Although the Steering Committee was designed to reflect diverse stakeholders in the performance pay program (teachers, principals, district administration, the teachers association, and business interests), three distinct perspectives gained prominence through its work. The first was that of district administration, which was ultimately responsible for implementing and maintaining the program. The second was that of the teachers association, which was the consultation agent for all teachers in the district. The third was that of the business community, which had taken an active interest in compensation reform in Hill ISD.

These three groups made up most of the membership on the Steering Committee. However, they did not all hold equal sway over the program's design and implementation. Instead, the perspectives of education professionals, namely the district administration and the teachers association, were most evident in the committee's decision-making. Given that the only other constituency represented on the Steering

Committee was parents (which had only one member), this is perhaps not surprising. However, the extent of agreement between the Program Director, representing the district administration, and the Teachers Association President was somewhat surprising given the often adversarial relationships between district administrations and teachers unions, particularly on the issue of performance pay. These two members expressed a view of the performance pay program that emphasized providing supports for teachers and cast monetary incentives as more of a form of recognition than a motivating factor.

Business interests had not been strongly represented on the Task Force on Teacher Support and Compensation that originally formulated the program's structure. They had become more involved upon the creation of the Steering Committee, which fleshed out the program's structure and implemented it. Yet, they were still a minority on the committee and were not always able to commit the time attention to it that district administrators and teachers association representative were. In that light, the perspective of the education professionals had clearly come to dominate the program's design and execution. While the Business Representative preferred a program design that was more focused on performance, the actual design of the program incorporated supports that he considered outside the scope of incentive pay. Its theory of action was similarly centered on instructional improvement rather than on teacher motivation.

It was unclear how well these perspectives were understood by program participants outside the Steering Committee. As a unit, the committee engaged in little direct communication with teachers or school administrators. In fact, none of the teachers

I interviewed seemed to know that the Steering Committee even existed. However, the teachers association communicated regularly with their members and with teachers in program schools through site visits and newsletters to all school in the district. These communications emphasized the supports included in the program. The Program Director and his central office staff also engaged directly with teachers on a regular basis through in-school trainings on student learning objectives and managing the mentoring and Take One!® components. Thus, they had many opportunities to relay their perspectives on the program's purpose, goals, and theory of action to principals and teachers implementing the components in classrooms. Business interests on the committee had few such opportunities, although they may have had the ear of other business and political stakeholders with an interest in the program.

As a result, the Steering Committee relayed mixed messages and unclear intentions to those implementing the program. Informational brochures and videos provided to teachers and school administrators described the program as a "teaching and learning" initiative designed to "support and reward" teachers and administrators. However, the bonuses and stipends within the program itself communicated different messages about the use of incentives to motivate behavior and the relative value of different aspects of teachers' work. Program goals were also communicated in broad terms that left ample room for interpretation (e.g., "ensuring a quality teacher in every classroom," and "improving student learning at all schools and for all students."). The multiple incentives and components included presented a muddied message as well about

the program's focus. Teachers, school administrators, and district administrators were thus left largely to make their own determinations about the program's specific goals and purpose. As described in the following chapters, their interpretations were influenced by their experiences with the program and by the contexts in which they implemented it.

Chapter 6: Sensemaking and Sensegiving in the District Central Office

The district performance pay program office was responsible for managing program operations, including distribution of stipends and awards, providing training and assistance to teachers and principals in developing student learning objectives, evaluating learning objectives, and managing the mentoring and Take One!® components. The office, with eight full-time staff members including the Program Director, provided the most direct means of communication between the Steering Committee and schools about the program. As such, they were important mediators between policymakers and policy implementers (and were also policy implementers at the district level themselves).

The program staff held understandings about Hill ISD's performance pay program that were similar to those of the Program Director and the Teachers Association President. They viewed the program as a means of supporting teachers and promoting instructional improvement. They were united in this perspective, and were more emphatic about using the program to improve instruction than anyone on the Steering Committee. Furthermore, they deemphasized the role of financial incentives in the program, casting them as somewhat superficial motivations. The program staff were able to communicate these perspectives to teachers and school administrators through their direct work with them. However, those views did not fully align with the structure of the program itself, which was based on financial incentives and included multiple outcomes and practices. Therefore, despite the support provided from the program office, school practitioners

were still receiving messages about the program's purpose and goals that were unclear and offered little guidance about the changes that were being expected of them.

History and Overview

The district program office in support of Hill ISD's performance pay program was created in 2007 just before the first year of program implementation. The Steering Committee determined early that year that a support team was needed to train teachers in the student learning objectives system and to manage the mentoring and professional development components (see note 10). Three staff members, known as the core team, were hired that summer; two to provide learning objectives support and one to manage mentoring and Take One!®. A third learning objectives administrator was added after the first year.

In their first year, the core team members were embedded in different departments in the district, although their positions were funded through the performance pay program. The learning objectives administrators were housed in the curriculum and instruction department, while the mentoring and Take One!® manager was housed in a professional development department. They reported to the directors of those departments, although their work was overseen by the performance pay Program Director. The intention behind this arrangement was to integrate the program into existing district operations and to help program staff avoid challenges that could arise from insufficient knowledge of other district programs and practices. However, supervising program staff and coordinating their work proved difficult (see note 10). In 2008, a

formal office for the performance pay program was created and all staff were housed together under the supervision of the Program Director.

In the program's first year, the core team also met weekly with a District Operations Team (DOT), composed of staff from other district departments whose functions related to the program (e.g., management information systems, human resources). The purpose of the DOT was to manage implementation issues that pertained to other departments, for example, challenges experienced by teachers in working with the district's student data warehousing system. The DOT was considered ineffective because its membership did not adequately address program needs. For instance, no one from the payroll department was represented to facilitate distribution of stipends and awards (see note 10). The DOT was discontinued in 2008.

At that point, program staff began to work largely independently within the district. They formally coordinated their efforts with other departments by participating on existing districtwide committees and working groups, such as monthly curriculum meetings, and by requesting assistance as needs arose. Central office staff reported requesting assistance in identifying appropriate assessments and developing learning objectives for unique content areas (e.g., fine arts, physical education) and unique program participants (e.g., counselors and librarians). However, they did not identify any ongoing or regular collaboration with other departments in the central office.

From its inception, the program office provided a service delivery model that was unique in the district. Whereas most departments that provided training or professional

development typically “brought teachers to them” by setting up workshops or seminars for teachers to attend off campus, the performance pay program office “went to the teachers” by conducting training sessions at each pilot school. Staff members referred to these visits as “traveling,” which provides a sense of the degree to which this was an unusual practice in the district. The staff members, Program Director, and Teachers Association President, as well as several teachers and school administrators interviewed, all lauded this practice as a model for service delivery and an aspect of the program that was particularly effective. As one staff member commented,

> I think that's one of the most powerful things that we've done. That idea of embedded [professional development] where we go to you. You don't come to us. I think that makes a huge difference, having that individual attention where I can sit down with you and look at your kids and your data and say you need to move them this far or [ask] what you see happening. Having those conversations, I think that makes a huge difference in how teachers look at their kids and their data. I mean, it makes it a lot more personal in a lot of ways.

The staff viewed this practice as effective in communicating their expectations as well as providing assistance directly to teachers. However, it was time-consuming and demanding on learning objectives staff. They spent the first two months of each school year visiting schools before reviewing the learning objectives teachers submitted. They then spent about another month at the beginning of the spring semester visiting schools to assist teachers in revising their objectives before the final submission deadline in February. Finally, they conducted school visits at the end of the school year to assist teachers in submitting posttest data related to their objectives. In all, the staff spent four to five months of each year out of the office visiting schools. The mentoring and Take

One!® manager also spent extensive time at schools training and evaluating mentors and providing support to teachers working on National Board portfolios.

As the school year during which data was collected for this study began, the program office was expanded to become responsible for a broader array of programs and policies related to educator quality. These included professional development and teacher and administrator evaluation. The Program Director was also named as the chair of a districtwide committee of central office administrators and external stakeholders (including the Teachers Association President) to examine and revise the district's system of benchmark student assessments. The expansion of the office's role and reach into other district programs indicated that the program was beginning to influence other district programs and practices.

Sensemaking in the Program Office

The respondents for this case included four staff members and the Program Director (who was also included in the Steering Committee case). Staff members included the manager of the mentoring and Take One!® programs and the three administrators responsible for learning objectives support and evaluation. All of them had experience as classroom teachers. One had also been a school administrator, and another had also been an instructional coach. Two had also been mentor teachers. Thus, they all, including the Program Director, came from teaching backgrounds and most also had experience supervising or training teachers.

The nature of the administrators' work was quite heavily focused on instruction through their roles as support providers and as evaluators of teachers' learning objectives and mentoring work. Combined with their backgrounds in teaching and in working with teachers, it was not surprising that their discussion of the program centered on its effects on instruction and the challenges they faced in changing teaching practices in the pilot schools. Here, I describe three areas of their sensemaking that emerged in their interviews, their perceptions of the program's purpose and goals, challenges they perceived in implementing the program, and their dual roles as support providers and evaluators.

Program Purposes and Goals.

Like the Steering Committee members, the program staff distinguished two aspects of the program, incentives and instructional supports. The Program Director, as described in Chapter 5, noted that both aspects were "mutually reinforcing" and carried somewhat equal weight. As he said, "[W]hat we're trying to do is [move] the system through a combination of supports and rewards to better lead to high-quality instruction at all of our schools in all of our classrooms." The program staff, though, were clearly more attuned to the support side of the program and defined it almost exclusively as an instructional improvement initiative. As these comments from two different administrators exemplify, they tended to downplay the role of the program's financial awards.

> We want this to be about teaching and learning. Although we pay you … I mean, it is a little bit of pay for performance, but it should be about student achievement.
>
> It isn't just about the money; it's a system where there is support. You know, people come out and they help you and we figure things out and we improve when you don't get things right. So it isn't just about the money. It should be about the kids and it should be about the support and the money's nice.

As seen in these comments, the tone of these discussions about the financial incentives was mildly derisive. At one point, teachers' and principals' interest in incentives was described as "superficial." In this vein, like the Program Director, they described the primary program goal as improving student achievement by improving instruction. In these discussions, they described a vision of instruction that incorporated diagnostic, goal-oriented approaches based on examination of assessment data and reflection on practice. As they described,

> Administrator 1[15]: [W]e're working on goal setting, and there's a lot that goes into that from looking at the data and determining those areas of need, to writing the assessment and making an appropriate goal and, even going further, progress monitoring towards that goal.
>
> Administrator 2: And examining your practice as a teacher is super important in between.
>
> Administrator 1: Absolutely.

This vision of instruction was shared by the Steering Committee members, who similarly discussed goal-setting based on examination of data as instructional practices they would like to promote through the program.

One of the notable features of the program staff's discussions of instructional improvement was the expectations for change they had developed around these goals for teachers' practice. For them, the student learning objectives were intended to focus teachers throughout the school year on the topics and students included in them. They were not merely performance indicators or outcomes, but planning tools and yardsticks to be referred to on an ongoing basis. One student learning objectives administrator described the goal of their work with teachers as "[making] sure that [teachers are] spiraling [goals] throughout the year and thinking about it throughout the year and incorporating it into everything [they] do. If you've identified it as a need, we want to make sure that you're addressing the need throughout the entire year." Similarly, the Program Director described the goal of creating fundamental changes in instructional practice as one of the main challenges his staff were facing and as a missing element in the program.

> [E]ven if [teachers are] into it, and they set those objectives, what happens after that? If these are bookends, pre- and posttest, what happens in between? There has to be more that takes that baton of diagnostic thinking and helps it spiral throughout the year. I think there was the sense, 'well, then the principals and teachers will just run with it. They'll seek better [professional development]. They'll do this, this, and this.' It's just not happening naturally. So the question is, what other pieces of our program could we put in place that would take some of the power that we think is in those conversations, those habits of mind of thinking more diagnostically and actually embed them in the work throughout the year?

These high expectations for change carried over into their expectations for performance. The program staff and Program Director were clear that they saw the program's financial incentives as directed toward above average performance. Whereas

they wanted all teachers to fully engage in the program's instructional support activities, they expected awards to be reserved for those who had performed especially well. In one exchange, the administrators commented,

> Administrator 1: I think ultimately we want to recruit and retain and recognize and reward teachers for good work.
>
> Administrator 2: Better than good.
>
> Administrator 3: Exceptional.
>
> Administrator 4: Excellent work.

Likewise, in discussing the retention stipends, the Program Director noted that, "Having high retention rates in and of itself is not a good thing. Are you recruiting and retaining the right people who are [providing high-quality instruction]?"

Implementation Challenges.

Holding such ambitious expectations often led to frustration for the program staff, particularly the administrators who worked with teachers on learning objectives. Where they perceived the program as not penetrating teaching practice to the degree they would have liked, they attributed much of the problem to teachers' and principals' lack of the capacity for the kind of instructional change for which they were striving. Unlike the business representative's discussions of teachers' capacity, their comments did not center on innate abilities, attitudes, or motivation. Rather, they emphasized inadequate skills and knowledge. They commented on teachers' lack of skills in using the technologies used to submit learning objectives and assessment data. They noted that many teachers had little understanding of how to use formative assessments regularly in their instruction. They

discussed some teachers' lack of understanding about setting goals and following them through an entire school year. The Program Director also commented that the staff had had to do more training than expected on analyzing and using student assessment data. These issues presented more than just unexpected challenges for them. They felt that they often lost valuable time discussing substantive instructional issues with teachers while they were building knowledge and skills in more basic areas.

Another challenge discussed by the program staff was in working with school principals, specifically those that were seen as unsupportive of the program. The staff viewed principals as important mediators between themselves and teachers, given their roles as campus leaders. As one student learning objectives administrator explained, "The principal plays a huge role in…how the campus perceives the program and how they receive it in many ways because they set the tone for that campus." Another elaborated,

> Frankly, we have more success at some campuses than at others. And in my humble opinion, I think that's largely to do with how the administrator, like campus administrators, in particular a principal, how they discuss it, how they make it part of their meetings, part of the campus discussion, basically.

Staff members described several ways that they perceived some principals undermining or limiting the potential effectiveness of the program among teachers. One was by not integrating the program components into other initiatives at the school. This was seen as resulting in symbolic compliance wherein the principals were following the letter, but not necessarily the spirit of the program. The Program Director explained,

> We have some principals who don't do a whole lot with our student learning objectives. Even though you'd think it's an amazing opportunity

> to embed their expectations into the day to day work of teachers, we're not seeing a lot of evidence that that has actually occurred. Now, why is that? You would think [if] the incentive is for schools to improve, principals would jump on that. And yet without a lot of additional training and context, it's not happening by itself. So a big question for us is, how do we work with principals so that we're preparing them to use some of these tools in a way that actually affects practice? Because if it's simply compliance - they're signing off on things and they're not using it without putting their own stamp on it - we're finding the tools themselves don't create the outcomes we have in mind. It's how the tools get used in context, particularly by the principals, the principals with teachers, that makes all the difference in the world.

Again, the concern among program staff was the degree to which the program was creating substantive changes in instructional practice. Note that the Program Director's solution to this problem was to provide more training for principals under the assumption that principals wanted to make better use of the student learning objectives, but did not know how to do so effectively. This type of solution was proposed by program staff to most issues arising from a lack of fit between their expectations of practice and the practices they observed. Most such differences were attributed to inadequate knowledge or skills, making additional training and support a viable and logical solution.

Another action by principals that frustrated program staff was behaving in ways that demonstrated, to them, a lack of support for the program. This was particularly problematic when principals were seen as passing unsupportive attitudes on to teachers, which was viewed as undermining teachers' support. One staff member explained, "When the principal says one thing to the campus and says another thing to us, it makes it

really hard for teachers to get on board." Another added, "When we see a lack of buy in from the principals, we will also see a lack of buy in from the teachers."

Staff were also frustrated by principals they thought were communicating with teachers inaccurately about the program. A particularly frustrating misrepresentation attributed to both teachers and principals was that the program did not require teachers to change their practices to earn financial rewards. One program administrator noted,

> Some principals have definitely sold this program as "Oh, you do that already!" And that isn't necessarily the case, and there is a lot of push back on those campuses where that was their pitch.

In the staff's opinion, of course, participation in the program entailed significant changes to instructional practice. The attitude that it would require little to no change for teachers was thus especially vexing to them.

The mentoring component manager expressed concerns about some principals as well regarding their use of mentors assigned to their schools. She described how some principals too often used mentor teachers to take on administrative duties not related to their mentoring work or to fill in for absent teachers. She also described how some principals requested information from mentors about specific teachers even though mentors are required to keep individualized information confidential. Confidentiality was considered to be more of a problem in elementary schools, perhaps because of their smaller size with often very small groups of beginning teachers assigned to mentors.

In discussing their challenges with some principals, the program staff (though not the Program Director) commented on the stipends that are given to principals without

performance requirements. The stipends are ostensibly to reward principals' efforts in working with teachers on student learning objectives and recognize their contribution to student performance as instructional leaders. However, in the staff's opinion, some of them were not earning those rewards. They explained,

> Administrator 1: Ideally, [principals are] supposed to meet individually with teachers and have this really fantastic conversation about what's happening in their classrooms, but they don't necessarily do that.
>
> Administrator 2: The reality of it is it happens on some campuses. Some campuses, it's phenomenal what has happened with that process, and then on other campuses, you know it's not happening. You know because when the teachers say, "I'm supposed to meet with [my principal]? Really? I didn't meet with him." Okay.
>
> Administrator 3: Mmm hmm. And we look and [that teacher's] learning objectives have been approved [by the principal].

As this exchange indicated, there seemed to be some resentment toward principals who did not follow program requirements and protocols yet earned significant financial stipends for their participation in the program. During this exchange, they commented on their desire for greater accountability for principals in the program. They noted that it was often left to them to discuss noncompliance issues with the principals, which they thought should not be their responsibility.

Role as Support Providers.

As discussed earlier, it was clear throughout my interviews with the Program Director and staff that they identified more strongly with the support aspect of the program than with the incentive or performance evaluation components of it. When asked

directly about the duality of their roles as support providers and evaluators, all program staff members were quick to reply that they related more to their support role and considered that to be the most important and rewarding part of their work. They responded with this exchange,

> Administrator 1: I see ourselves more on the [professional development] end, on the support end. I think the checks and balances are sort of a necessary part of the program to make sure that when we're paying people, we're paying them for the right things, but I don't think that drives our discussions when we're on campus. When we're on campus, it's about the work. It's about supporting [teachers] in their work.
>
> Administrator 2: I would agree with that. I mean, we all would prefer to be doing PD rather than reading [student learning objectives].
>
> Administrator 3: And auditing. I think that the support part is what makes our jobs worthwhile.

Their evaluative role was something they considered tedious, but also a necessary part of the program. It was also a useful reflective tool that they used to improve their support work. As they explained,

> Administrator 1: You know, it's good to step back and get a perspective for what teachers have done. So in that sense the [learning objective evaluation] process kind of gives us a picture of what everyone did, and it helps us understand what we need to do differently.
>
> Administrator 2: It's a nice evaluative tool for us."

The Program Director similarly emphasized the support work of the program as its most important instigator of change. He noted that improving instruction was the most

critical strategy for improving student achievement and was thus the most important aspect of the program. He explained,

> The program needs to continue to be refined to get to the point where it's providing high-quality instruction everyday for all of those kids at all of our campuses. Because we know at the end of the day, it's high-quality instruction that's going to close achievement gaps, that's going to make all kids college ready, workplace ready in the future.

Drawing on his expanding role in the district, he further commented on his hopes for the program to result in changes in other district programs. He particularly wanted the district to emphasize school working conditions in their approaches to improving underperforming schools. He explained,

> I'm also hoping that our knowledge base that we're developing, not just about what good teaching looks like, but what are the conditions that support good teaching on a campus in terms of how teachers are assigned students; what [teachers'] course load looks like; how [teachers] operate with, communicate, and interact with their principals; how much time [teachers] have to work with each other. All those working conditions that we know impact success, those things need to also drive [district] policies and practices because our interventions, especially for low-performing schools, ought to be to look at what are the conditions in place that are impeding success. Because we know often there are good teachers at schools that are [Academically Unacceptable]. Imagine how great those schools could be if those systems could begin to change. Those teachers could begin to fully leverage their knowledge and skills. The current systems may actually be impeding those things.

Program staff echoed these aspirations, but their comments were more focused on classroom instruction and professional development. They commented that they wanted instruction to be less centered on TAKS passing standards, and that the learning objectives provided a means to achieve that. They also noted that their program,

especially the mentoring component, provided teachers with a safe space to experiment and acknowledge failures that largely did not exist within the accountability system.

Discussion

These ambitions for the program to change not just teacher compensation, but also larger systems of school and teacher supports were similarly expressed on the Steering Committee by the Teachers Association President and, of course, the Program Director. As discussed in Chapter 5, these members held goals for the program to provide instructional resources to teachers and to increase their professional authority. Program staff were similarly focused on teachers' work, and offered a specific model of teaching to work toward as well.

In examining the perspectives of the program staff and the "support and build" contingency of the Steering Committee (the Program Director and the Teachers Association President), a picture of the program emerged that revolved around teachers' working conditions, instruction, and student learning. From this perspective, student learning is improved by altering instructional practices, which is supported by increased professional authority, emphasis on student learning goals, continued reflection on progress toward those goals, and collaboration between teachers and principals on goals and instructional strategies.

This perspective, though, was not universally supported to the same extent on the Steering Committee. Notably, the business representative on the Steering Committee spoke little about instruction. He agreed that he hoped to see more goal-oriented teaching.

However, his assessment of the lack of such teaching in most schools centered on teachers' motivation and abilities to set and follow goals, as well as school cultures that do not emphasize goal attainment. For him, the value of the program lied more in sorting teachers according to their motivation and abilities, and then separating the strong from the weak through shifts in expectations and demands for performance.

The program structure itself also did not explicitly call for fundamental changes to instruction. Of all the practices promoted by the program staff, only goal-setting was specifically called for in the design of Hill ISD's performance pay program. The remainder were practices that were brought in as means to achieve broader goals. The recruitment and retention components, which were most closely tied to financial awards and less directly connected to instruction, were largely ignored in the discussions of the program staff. They all noted the importance of these components, but for reasons related more to achieving their instructional goals. The Program Director, for example, discussed the need to recruit teachers whose practices fit with the instructional model he wanted to promote. The program staff commented briefly on the value of retaining teachers in fostering collaboration in schools.

These differences in goals among policymakers and the expansion of the program's goals by the program staff created a complex program with an array of objectives for principals and teachers to implement in schools and classrooms. The program represented different contingencies that held different expectations, which were not always overtly communicated or consistent. Informational materials provided to

teachers and school administrators emphasized the procedures and requirements for developing student learning objectives, for example, but did not provide comprehensive models of instruction or professional development strategies. The most explicit communication of instructional models was done through the Take One!® and mentoring components. However, these activities were largely carried out by entities outside the district.[16] Additionally, only about 40 teachers participated in Take One!® in 2009-2010, and 23 teachers served as mentors. Those mentor teachers also served only teachers in their first three years of teaching. Thus, the proportion of teachers receiving explicit and direct information about teaching strategies was quite small. To understand the instructional vision of the program staff, most had to rely on the learning objectives process, which provided indirect information at best. Additionally, the program was layered on top of a range of other initiatives, past and present, along with a high-stakes accountability system. In this environment, principals and teachers were not always able to understand policymakers' goals and, instead, crafted their own understandings about the program. I now turn to this sensemaking within schools in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7: Sensemaking in the Schools

Teachers, administrators, and other instructional staff in schools represented the ground-level implementers of Hill ISD's performance pay program. They were responsible for acting on the program's incentives and support components in their day to day work with students. Teachers' interactions with the program's designers and district-level implementers were limited to working with central office staff on student learning objectives. This happened only once or twice a year at each school, although teachers could also communicate directly with program staff by email or phone if they chose to do so. Those who were serving as mentors and participating in Take One!® had more interactions with staff, but relatively few teachers participated in those components. Monthly meetings with central office staff were held for principals to update them on program requirements, deadlines, and changes. These meetings also provided opportunities for principals to discuss their experiences and questions with each other.

Because of their limited interactions with program staff and the incoherent messages they received from the Steering Committee, the program staff, and the program's structure, teachers and school administrators were largely left to determine the program's purpose and goals for themselves. They did so within the contexts of their students, their existing practices, and their internal goals. Most of this guidance at both schools came from the principals, who devised ways to fit the program, particularly the student learning objectives, into their school-wide goals. In some ways, their participation led to the types of changes in instruction envisioned by the program staff, but at times

teachers set aside program objectives to focus on more pressing goals, particularly accountability goals.

Without a strong sense of the program's purpose, teachers were also easily disillusioned by negative experiences. They came to understand ways in which they could be disadvantaged in earning performance awards by school- and student-level factors that were largely outside their control. Even teachers at Thompson, who had yet to experience the outcomes of their student learning objectives, were beginning to see how such problems could emerge. These aspects of teachers' and school administrators' implementation of the program were little understood by staff in the central office. They instead attributed what they viewed as limited changes to a lack of motivation or to incompetence.

This chapter describes sensemaking among teachers and administrators primarily about the two program components that emerged as most relevant for them, the student learning objectives and retention stipends.[17] The chapter also describes other key aspects of teachers' and administrators' experiences with the program, including their introductions to the program and decisions to participate, reported changes in their instructional practices, and specific challenges cited in by them implementing the program.

McCoy Elementary

McCoy Elementary lied within a small incorporated town that was surrounded on all sides by Hill ISD's main city. The town maintained a number of inter-local agreements

with the city for public services and its one school, McCoy, was within Hill ISD, but it remained an independent town. It had a very small population of less than 1,000 residents, and its 1.4 square miles were mostly residential with a few commercial properties. In the Hill ISD metro area, the town was known primarily for a vibrant and popular weekend farmers market, and an athletic complex owned by Hill ISD that included a football and track stadium, gymnasium, baseball fields, and soccer fields that were used by youth sports clubs as well as the school district.

McCoy's principal had been at the school for ten years. She described it as "a great school" with a "warm feel." Teachers' comments about the school focused as well on the climate, particularly teachers' relationships with one another. They described a collegial atmosphere in which teachers are supportive and work together often.

The school had also had minimal teacher turnover. Additionally, as described in Chapter 3, McCoy had a high proportion of veteran teachers. This proportion had grown steadily over the previous ten years, likely due to the lack of turnover. In 1999-2000, 32% of teachers had more than 20 years of experience. By 2008-2009, this percentage had grown to 42%. The school's proportion of teachers with 11-20 years of experience hovered around 30% from 1999-2000 to 2008-2009, making the proportion of teachers with 11 years or more experience over 60% (and up to 76%) in each year (see Appendix H for demographic tables).

Due perhaps to the minimal turnover at McCoy, its supportive atmosphere remained despite the school's changing student demographics. When the principal came

to McCoy in 1999-2000, 51% of students were economically disadvantaged. In 2008-2009, 79% of students were classified as such. Following district demographic trends, McCoy's percentages of English language learner (ELL) and Hispanic students also increased, although at rates greater than the district. Its percentage of ELL students grew from 25% in 1999-2000 to 52% in 2008-2009; its percentage of Hispanic students grew from 53% to 80.6%. During the same period, its percentage of white students fell from 40% to 13%.

Given the stability of the staff, these demographic changes presented considerable changes and challenges to McCoy's teachers. As the principal explained,

> [I]t's a difficult shift when you've taught one group of kids, and then you're in the same building, and you're now teaching a different group. But we have worked on adjusting and I think we've done a good job. It took us some years, but I think we're doing better now.

The teaching staff was described as a coherent group that planned instruction together and supported one another. Teachers described this environment as an important consideration in their decisions to work at McCoy. A third grade teacher who had begun her teaching career at McCoy five years earlier explained,

> Since I've been here, we've always worked as a team… Which kind of appealed to me in the first place. I saw that firsthand and I [thought], 'I want to work like that.' We get along personality-wise. We don't always agree, but we can disagree and not hate each other. Some people can't do that.

The principal was also described as being supportive of teachers while also holding high expectations for student achievement. The low turnover in the school was

cited by more than one teacher as an indicator of the strong relationships among teachers and the positive climate in the school.

McCoy's Introduction to the Hill ISD Performance Pay Program.

Hill ISD's performance pay program was introduced to McCoy Elementary in 2007. In the spring of that year, the principal had been contacted by the district core team about participating in the program. She was initially hesitant because the school had been participating in a professional development project with a local university and was not sure they would have time or energy for another initiative. She explained that other schools seemed more enthusiastic about participating, so she initially considered trying to participate in a later year. However, when she returned to her school before the start of the 2007-2008 school year, she was contacted again by the district core team and was asked to consider participating. Her understanding was that the district considered McCoy's student population and stable staff a good fit for the program. At that point, she sent a group of her teachers to an information session about the program. They had a positive response, so she agreed to have district representatives make a presentation to the entire teaching staff. Prior to that presentation, she and the teachers who had attended the information session met with the rest of the teaching staff to discuss the program. The principal told the teachers that, based on what she had learned about the program and the response of the teacher representative, she was enthusiastic but that the decision was ultimately up to them.

The district presentation occurred the week before the school year began and took place at the school. The program director and other members of the core team presented information about the components of the program, the district's goals, and how the program compared to other performance pay initiatives in the state and the country. Afterward, teachers voted on whether to participate. McCoy's official vote tabulation included one vote against, but the principal explained that that vote was from a teacher who had forgotten to submit her ballot (ballots not submitted were counted as votes against participation). Thus, all teachers voted in favor of participating.

The principal and teachers at McCoy mentioned several reasons why they were interested in participating in the program. The principal saw its requirements and processes, particularly the student learning objectives, as fitting with the kinds of professional practices she was seeking to instill in her staff, such as goal-setting based on student data and collaboration. However, she wanted to ensure that the program did not interfere with other professional development work or cause her and her staff to lose focus on the goals of that work. She explained, "I wanted to be sure that this was going to help us bring everything together that we'd already been working so hard to build, and was going to help us hone in on those skills rather than scatter us. But it seemed to fit with what it was that we were doing."

For their part, the teachers also cited fit with ongoing initiatives as a concern they had had about the program. They also had concerns about the time that would be required of them. Yet, they commented on a number of features of the program that appealed to

them. When asked what they hoped to gain from participating in the program, all the teachers responded straight away that the financial awards were an important, if not the most important, element. Two teachers also mentioned being intrigued by the challenge of setting specified instructional goals for themselves. As one of them noted, "I think a lot of us saw dollar signs and said, 'Yes, definitely, we want to try it out. Not that that was all of it. A lot of us thought, 'If I set a goal for myself, I'd be curious to see if I'd meet that goal.' If I do meet that goal, then bonus. I get money for that."

They also mentioned that they understood the pilot period to be only two years, which seemed brief and manageable (the program was implemented as a four-year pilot). In terms of the program components themselves, they liked that incentives were not tied solely to TAKS and could include teacher-made assessments, that the student learning objectives measured gains rather than absolute passing rates, that teachers in non-TAKS grade levels (prekindergarten through second grade) were included, and that the incentives were structured as bonuses and did not alter their base pay. One teacher, who was an active teachers association member, commented that she appreciated that the district collaborated with the association in developing the program.

In all, the principal and teachers saw the program as presenting minimal disruptions and few challenges. The emphasis on student gains and inclusion of measures other than TAKS seemed a refreshing change of pace from the norm of the accountability system. At the same time, it gave them the opportunity to earn additional compensation and bring in helpful instructional resources and supports.

Changes in Professional Decisions and Instructional Practices.

At the time the participants at McCoy Elementary were interviewed, they had been participating in the program for two and a half years (all the participants had been at the school for the entire period). They reported several ways the program had affected them professionally during this period, although they did not always directly attribute their practices to the program or acknowledge that their practices had changed significantly.

Teacher Retention.

One notable impact of the program that teachers mentioned was the effect of the retention stipend on their decisions to remain at the school. These stipends were new to McCoy in 2009-2010. Teachers and administrators who had been at the school for two years or more could receive $1,500 each year they remained. For their first two years in the program, the school had been classified as non-high needs and teachers were not eligible for retention stipends. The Steering Committee then created the category of Higher Needs schools based on the same student demographic variables as Highest Needs schools (but at lower school-wide percentages). McCoy was reclassified into this category, and teachers became eligible for the mentoring and retention components beginning in the fall of 2009 (when retention stipends are distributed).[18]

All but one teacher claimed that the retention stipend had already or would make them "think twice" about transferring to another school, given the choice. Two teachers had been considering transferring within the district the year before, but had decided to

stay, in part, to receive the stipend. However, these teachers had been considering transferring not because they were unhappy at McCoy, but because they were seeking different types of assignments (e.g., changing grade levels or student populations). One was a prekindergarten teacher who was team-teaching in an inclusion classroom. She had considered transferring to be assigned to a self-contained classroom with no partners. The other was a special education teacher with a background in teaching adolescents. She had considered transferring to a secondary school. They indicated, as did the other teachers, that the retention stipend alone would not be sufficient to retain them if they were dissatisfied with their leadership, their colleagues, or the school's climate.

Instruction.

Under the principal's direction, the teachers at McCoy were aligning their student learning objectives to the school-wide objective of increasing their accountability rating from Academically Acceptable to Recognized (and later Exemplary; see Appendix H for a description of the requirements for ratings in the Texas accountability system). This required increases in overall passing rates on TAKS, so teachers were directed to use TAKS as a performance measure, where possible, and to set performance targets so that each teacher's would achieve passing rates that would aggregate to the school-wide passing rates needed for the Recognized rating (set at 75% for the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years; increased to 80% for 2009-2010). Since TAKS goals were established by grade level, not by individual teacher or class, teachers collaborated in establishing their student learning objectives with their grade-level colleagues. Teachers

whose responsibilities spanned grade levels (such as special education teachers) established their learning objectives on their own, but still under the principal's approval and guidance.

All but one teacher claimed that the program had not influenced their teaching. Some said that they were more focused on preparing their students for TAKS than on meeting learning objectives, while others said that the goal-setting and tracking of student progress promoted by the program was not an influence because "this is what I do anyway." One teacher and the principal explained that the work the staff had been doing with an outside professional development provider incorporated many of the same elements of the student learning objectives process (e.g., examining student work and collaborating on common lessons).

After some discussion and probing (i.e., asking for examples to explain comments), though, some teachers illuminated ways that the focus of their instruction had changed. Specifically, the learning objectives had prompted them to pay more attention to the skills and concepts to which those goals pertained. For example, one prekindergarten teacher commented,

> I do think of [the learning objective], especially with the syllables [goal], because we didn't really assess that before until we made it our [learning objective] goal. So then, you know, it did make you think "Oh yeah, we need to do that again. Run through it again every time you're doing the alphabet, and the letter of the week kind of stuff to bring it up again." So I guess, you know, you've got it in the back of your mind, yes, I'm going to be assessing my kids on that.

The same teacher also discussed not meeting one of her learning objectives in the first year because of one student who "was really low and then didn't make any gains." The following year, she said that she paid more attention to the lowest-performing students in her class. She explained,

> It probably did make me think, 'Okay, maybe I do need to work on that [student] a little bit more. And I think that's probably why [the district] wanted to do this. You know, get those struggling kids.

Another second grade teacher commented that the learning objectives had encouraged her to focus on more complex skill sets, which she found gratifying. She commented,

> Last year, I liked it a lot because we pushed ourselves with word problems that incorporated all the skills. I knew it was going to be hard, but I knew it was the right thing. Professionally, I was happy with what I had done. I was happy that I had sent the kids [to third grade] knowing, most of them knowing, all the [skills] they were supposed to learn and not just one [skill].

At the same time, teachers who taught TAKS-tested grade levels (grades 3 through 5) noted that their primary instructional focus was always preparation for the state tests that would be administered to their students at the end of the year and whose results constituted the bulk of their school's accountability rating. Given that priority, they sometimes found themselves being forced to choose between working toward their learning objective goals and the skills their students needed to master for TAKS. A third grade teacher described this dilemma in her classroom,

> My math [learning objective] is on measurement. I can't realistically teach measurement all the time throughout the year to get these kids expert on measurement. I have to teach multiplication, division, rounding,

> estimating, you know, all these other concepts and skills that kind of leave me to think of [the performance pay program] as being on the back burner.

They also saw the learning objectives as part of the analysis they would have done otherwise on students' readiness for TAKS. A special education teacher, who worked with teachers in grades 3 through 5, explained,

> There is so much pressure to pass the TAKS. I don't really think that this is changing how [regular classroom teachers] teach. We already, every time [students] take a [middle-of-year benchmark test], every time they take a [beginning-of-year benchmark test], we go through and look at items they missed and specific data and details. That is all TAKS-driven. So… we'd be doing the same thing. The goals that we pick, we're told they have to be something we're weak in anyway. You have to have proof of what you're low in to pick that goal. Well, of course, if you're low on [a skill] on the [middle-of-year benchmark test], then that's what you're going to be focusing on.

In this comment, this teacher was describing the ways that teachers at McCoy would have been examining student data and setting goals based on weaknesses demonstrated by that data regardless of the program's learning objectives, due to the emphasis on TAKS at the school. Their learning objectives were also being set to be aligned with weaknesses in preparation for TAKS. So, there was little differentiation between TAKS goals and learning objectives goals, which may have diluted the perceived influence of the program on their goal-setting practices. When learning objective goals did differ from TAKS goals, as with the third grade teacher's comments, teachers could feel forced to set aside those learning objectives, and the incentive awards that accompanied them, in service of preparation for TAKS. Teachers in non-TAKS

grades (prekindergarten through second grade), on the other hand, had less pressure to prepare students for state tests and were more able to focus on their learning objectives.

The principal understood these motivational distinctions between grade levels, and had come to use the learning objectives as a tool to incentivize teachers in lower grade levels to focus more on student readiness for higher grade levels and TAKS. One way she was accomplishing this was to require those teachers to use district assessments aligned to state standards in their learning objectives. Those objectives, with financial awards attached, could then be used as a pressure on teachers that had not existed before.

> It's not a requirement of the program for the teachers to have to use the reading assessments that are given in the primary grades, but I make it a requirement on this campus because it helps. I've seen that one piece really help the teachers really push it because, hey, we want kids reading on [grade] level by the time… they leave that grade level. And yes, it's [always been] an expectation, but what happens if it doesn't happen? Well, now what happens if it doesn't happen [is] you don't get your money.

By using the learning objectives to focus teachers in primary grades on TAKS readiness, the principal was better able to rally the whole faculty around her school-wide goals of attaining an Exemplary rating for McCoy. Accordingly, she required all teachers to incorporate TAKS passing rates of 80% for all students into their learning objectives. This was an increase from the 75% passing rate she had required the year before, and was in line with the rates required for Exemplary and Recognized ratings, respectively.

Challenges in Setting Learning Objective Goals.

One of the greatest challenges teachers at McCoy faced in implementing the performance pay program was in setting appropriate goals for their learning objectives.

Having gone through several rounds of setting, submitting, and revising learning objectives, and then seeing their subsequent results, they had come to pay a great deal of attention to the ways those goals were constructed to ensure fairness and fit with other requirements and initiatives.

Setting Achievable Objectives.

One important consideration was achievability. After witnessing colleagues, and themselves, failing to meet goals by small margins or because of factors beyond their control (such as students transferring into and out of their classrooms), they had begun to structure their objectives carefully to account for such situations. For example, they had begun to use tiered objectives (in which different performance thresholds apply to different subgroups of students in the class) and to word objectives in ways that gave them some flexibility in terms of the students to which goals applied. The principal explained what she had learned in this regard,

> In the first year, it wasn't real clear as far as how to word [learning objectives]. And so, if you said 18 out of 20 [students will pass] and then some of those kids moved, you still had to have 18 [students passing]. So, we had to learn about not wording so specifically, but really more globally so that all of your kids are included by that snapshot date, that that's all we have to count. It [doesn't include] the kids that left, you know. I had teachers wanting to go, "Oh, I know what school they're going to. Can I go there and ask if I can test them?" No! So, it really gets to that.

The learning objectives had also illuminated tensions between focusing on growth and focusing on passing rates. Learning objectives were to be structured around growth, with goals stated as expected gains between pretest and posttest scores or proficiency levels. However, the teachers and principal at McCoy had centered their

instruction around TAKS and accountability ratings, which were measured as passing rates. At times, these goals conflicted, as when students met growth goals but did not pass TAKS or vice versa. These situations created confusion and were disheartening to teachers. The principal described how some teachers in the first year did not meet learning objectives based on growth even though their students passed TAKS.

> We wanted those kids that were lowest to make a 40 point gain. That's super. And [with some teachers] we even did it at 44. So, we're gonna make a 44 point gain. So, here's this kid who's at 50, and he's supposed to score a 94. So, [that teacher's] not getting credit [for the learning objective] even though she has all of her kids passing. So, that was a little heartbreaking. It's not saying that we're gonna lowball [objectives] at all, but you have to be reasonable, too. To get a kid from a 50 to a 94 is just… Yeah, you want to get that kid from a 30 to a 70 because you want them at least passing, but to 94 from a 50, that's a little different.

As this story illustrates, the learning objectives set by teachers at McCoy often required students who performed at very low levels on pretests to make tremendous gains. The program staff were not necessarily requiring teachers to establish especially ambitious goals, but the principal had required teachers to set their objectives at levels that would enable the school to meet TAKS passing thresholds to achieve a Recognized (later an Exemplary) rating. Thus, some students who performed poorly on benchmark pretests would be required to make tremendous gains. Some teachers with such students complained that these high performance targets put them at a disadvantage, and claimed that they probably would not meet their learning objectives as a result. These problems were abated somewhat in the second and third years by using tiered objectives in which different performance targets could be applied to different groups of students. That

enabled teachers to set goals at more achievable levels for all of their students. However, the principal continued to press for objectives that would enable the school to increase its accountability ratings each year.

Experiences with D2 Assessments.

As discussed in Chapter 4, during the program's second year, the Steering Committee briefly required core subject teachers in grades 3 through 11 to use a uniform assessment system for at least one of their learning objectives. Teachers at McCoy were required to use this system. Like teachers in other participating schools, they experienced a number of difficulties with it. The principal and several teachers noted that the assessments were not well aligned to the TEKS. They also found the assessments quite difficult and time-consuming for students. A third grade teacher described them,

> [It] was a very flawed and messed up and unfair system. The tests that we gave were just, the reading test, for example, was just poorly worded, convoluted questions, questions that covered fourth grade skills. It was an extremely difficult test. My team members and I, we were trying to answer the questions. There was a question where I thought the answer was C, another thought the answer was B, this teacher thought the answer was A. I thought, 'That's bad when the teacher can't…'. And we all had good reasons why each answer made sense.

The third grade teachers, like most teachers at McCoy, collaborated on their student learning objectives. They set the same objectives using the same assessments. In responding to the requirement to the D2 mandate, they used the assessments for both learning objectives, one on reading and one on mathematics. They did not examine the assessments before administering them as pretests to students. Thus, they had little understanding of their content prior to including them in their learning objectives. As the

same third grade teacher explained, “Our principal said, ‘Treat this like a benchmark or a TAKS test. You don't look at the test. You don't prep the kids for the pre-assessment.’ So we didn't look at the test. We had no idea that this test was so ridiculously unfair and difficult, and at that point, it was too late.” However, this teacher contacted the program office after the learning objectives had been established, and was told that they should have examined the D2 assessments before using them. This only added to her frustration, as she clearly agreed with her principal about the appropriate use of the assessment.

At the end of the year, a number of teachers using the D2 assessments (including the one quoted above) did not meet their learning objectives despite having met them in the previous year. This was obviously disappointing for many because they did not receive their awards because of a requirement they viewed as unfair. As the same third grade teacher said, “I just feel like I was duped. I used this really bad test, unfair test [and] I really didn't stand a chance of making my goal.” She was also unhappy about the effect the assessments had had on her students, who were very challenged by them.

In the following year (the one during which data for this study were collected), the requirement to use the D2 assessments was eliminated and teachers were able to use assessments of their choosing again. For the principal, this was an opportunity to refocus on TAKS goals by aligning them with student learning objectives. She explained,

> The teachers are making their own tests that are more aligned with what they’re already doing in the classroom as well as with the Benchmarks and the TAKS. They’re taking passages that are related to the objectives that we did the poorest on last year. And then, it’s not foreign to the kids; it’s not foreign to the teachers. The teachers aren’t having to look at the test to figure out how to teach the skill. It’s more closely aligned and connected.

Perceptions of Fairness.

The D2 assessments, along with other experiences with the performance pay program, brought out a number of issues related to fairness among teachers at McCoy. The teachers I spoke to had varied experiences in meeting their learning objectives. One met both objectives in both years the school had participated; two met only one goal in one year and then both the next; another met both goals in one year, and then neither the next. Yet, they all noted ways in which the objectives could be unfair to some teachers.

One issue they commented on was the way objectives were set between teachers. The third grade teacher noted that, during the second year, teachers in grades Prekindergarten through 2 had more time during the school year to meet their objectives than teachers at her grade level. Recall that teachers in grades 3 through 11 had been required to base at least one of their learning objectives on a TAKS objective, and the teachers at McCoy had set both objectives this way. Although their students were assessed for the learning objectives using the D2 assessments, the objectives were related to TAKS and so that test became, in essence, the assessment for which they were preparing their students. TAKS tests are administered in April of each year. While the D2 assessments were not required to be administered until mid-May, this teacher felt that her students needed to be prepared for it by April when they took the TAKS. Teachers in lower grades could administer their posttests as late as mid-May, giving them an additional four to six weeks of instructional time.

Setting objectives among teachers within grade levels, as well as across grade levels, also became a point of comparison. In the first year of participation, according to program guidelines, teachers' objectives were set largely individually, based on their student data from the prior year. In the second year, though, teachers began to collaborate more within grade levels on setting learning objectives so that each of their objectives were identical. The principal encouraged this to focus teachers more on school-wide goals, but teachers also took it upon themselves to do so out of concerns about fairness. Their actions are illustrated in this vignette from a second grade teacher.

> The first year, I didn't get any compensation because my learning objective, the percentage, we made a mistake. [Compared to] all the second grade teachers, my percentage was too high. It was like 85% of the students will go up by 45 points, and everybody else had like 40 [points], and then I didn't look. It was clearly a mistake that I had [made]. When I met with [the program staff], that was my percentage that he was giving according to my data, but then I didn't talk with the other second grade teachers. We just left it, okay, we met individually [with the program staff] and then we left it.
>
> At the end of the year, when I looked at the other percentages, they were much lower than mine. We have pretty much the same scores, so my question was, if we pretty much have the same results, why was my [target] percentage much higher than theirs? And so I talked to [the program staff] and I said, 'There's clearly a mistake. You can see it. It's tangible. It's concrete. It was my mistake, I clearly understand.' When they ask you to review your SLO and see if you want to change something, I didn't review anything. 'It should be fine,' I said. What could change? My students numbers have not changed. It's still the same objective. It didn't occur to me that I had to look at the numbers compared to the other teachers to see if they were the same. I didn't understand what kind of changes they were asking me to make. But it's good. I learned. This year, we all met and we compared just to be sure we were all on the same page, that we had the same numbers according to what we got [on the pretest].

> See, it wouldn't be fair to have me at a lesser [standard]. It wouldn't be fair for the other teachers. Or vice versa.

This kind of story was repeated by other teachers at McCoy, who seemed to all set their learning objectives as grade levels, not as individuals. This was not seen by them as an attempt to "game" the system by creating artificially low expectations. Rather, it was seen an issue of fairness and equality. Another teacher commented about her grade-level team, "We've always thought of our third graders as *our* third graders, not your third graders and her third graders." In other words, these teachers made little distinction between their students and those of their grade-level colleagues. In that context, it seemed only fair to them to set their goals equally as teams in spite of differences between them in their students' prior performance.

These concerns about fairness illustrate that teachers at McCoy engaged in comparisons between one another based on meeting learning objectives. Indeed, some teachers noted that they experienced a sense of embarrassment at not meeting their objectives. A prekindergarten teacher described her experience in this regard,

> The first year, I met one of my goals but I didn't meet the other one. And then when you hear some other teachers talk about, 'Oh, well, I met both of mine,' you think in your mind, 'Well, they probably think I'm a horrible teacher.' That's not what they're thinking, but you just have that thought.

Another teacher described the resentment that could arise from such comparisons among teachers. She explained,

> There are very good teachers that don't get anything and its very unfortunate. I think all it could do is create resentment. You know, you got your money. I didn't get my money. However, you got your money, but are you a better teacher than me? No. We all want everyone else around us to

> make our goals, but between the ones that do and the ones that don't, there is a little, not hate. I don't hate someone that made their goal, but I don't… It's nice that they made their goal, but I still don't think the effectiveness of [those] teachers has anything to do with this money.

It is important to note that comparisons between teachers may have been heightened when the local newspaper published the names and schools of teachers who received learning objective stipends, along with the amount of money each received. This took teachers off guard, as they were not aware that this would happen until midway through the first year of the program.[19]

Teachers also grew skeptical of other aspects of the program. Two teachers pointed to the School-Wide TAKS Growth component as confusing and unfair. These teachers and the principal commented that the faculty had made an effort to meet that goal the previous year, but had not done so. As described in Chapter 4, this component is based on a state measure derived from comparing school-level changes in TAKS passing rates in reading/English language arts and mathematics to those of schools with similar student demographics. In discussing this component, the teachers commented that the comparison schools seemed unfairly selected because they were located in different districts and some were middle schools. They were also confused at not meeting the goal because the school had improved its passing rates from the previous year and had earned a Recognized rating. As one of the teachers said, "To me, it's just this random money that falls from the sky. There was no rhyme or reason [to it]."

Finally, one teacher was critical of a second round of learning objective stipends that were awarded to teachers who had met their objectives in the second year, when the

D2 assessments were used. This arose from Hill ISD's receipt of funds from the DATE program, which required them to distribute any remaining performance award funds at the end of the grant cycle to teachers who had met their learning objectives.[20] Teachers at McCoy were informed of the second round of stipends midway through the third year, after awards for performance in the second year had already been distributed. The third grade teacher described her reaction,

> They're getting paid for last year's goals, which they were already compensated for. So now you're bringing up bad things with the teachers [who] didn't make their goals, the TAKS grade teachers. Because we were the ones most affected in a negative way… You know, on the one hand, I'm happy for the teachers [who] made their goals last year, but should they get paid again? No.

She noted that, in the faculty meeting in which this was discussed, some teachers who were to receive additional awards claimed that they did not want them or would rather they be given to the school. However, this was not an option (although individual teachers could certainly use their awards independently for school benefit). The district opted to return remaining funds in their application for continued DATE funding for the next year.

Discussion.

McCoy Elementary represented a unique environment in which to examine teachers' responses to performance pay. While its staff had long been characterized by stability, its student population was becoming increasingly challenging. In this context, Hill ISD's performance pay program could have been subsumed by the largely veteran faculty's traditions, or it could have been used to adjust to changing student needs.

It appears that, to some extent, both occurred. While the program did not appear to have a tremendous influence on instructional practices, the principal learned to use it to advance school-wide goals. Teachers also adapted the program by using it as a vehicle for grade-level collaboration instead of establishing goals on an entirely individual basis. Most of these changes occurred gradually, as teachers and the principal gained experience with the program and developed ways to use it to meet their needs. However, the instructional changes that did occur were difficult to sustain in the face of more pressing instructional priorities. This was especially true for TAKS grade teachers, who could feel pressed to set their incentive goals aside to focus on preparing their students for the state tests that were so critical to McCoy's accountability rating.

Over time, some teachers also became more skeptical of the program, questioning the credibility of its performance components. Their experiences with the D2 assessments created some disillusion and frustration, which was compounded by confusion over the TAKS Growth component, and DATE funding requirements. This is not to say that McCoy teachers' experiences and perceptions of the program were entirely negative. To the contrary, they all described positive experiences and expressed positive perceptions of the program's purposes and goals. Their views did appear to have altered over time, though, and were focused on how best to achieve program objectives. There was little evidence that they had made the types of changes to their instruction sought by program staff. This may not always have been the case. As the experiences of the teachers and administrators at Thompson Elementary will show, McCoy teachers may have made

more changes to their practices early in their participation, even though they may not have been able to sustain them.

Thompson Elementary

Thompson, which had prior experience with performance pay as a participant in the TEEG program in 2007 and 2008, was a high poverty school with high proportions of economically disadvantaged and English language learner students. The school had had high turnover among teachers in the past, but that problem was beginning at abate at the time they became involved in the Hill ISD performance pay program. In this section, I first discuss context and history of the school and their prior experiences with performance pay. Then I discuss their experiences with the Hill ISD program. As I will show, teachers at Thompson saw the main purpose of the program as retaining teachers, which was an important concern at the school. As happened at McCoy, the principal framed the program around school-wide goals. In response, teachers reported some changes to their instruction that could have resulted in significant changes across content areas and grade levels if sustained and expanded. As was also the case at McCoy, though, these changes were difficult to sustain considering demands emanating from the accountability system.

Background and History.

Thompson Elementary was located on the East side of Hill ISD's main city. This area of the city was historically African American and Hispanic, and predominately low-income, in contrast to the city's wealthier, and whiter, West side. For decades, schools in

this part of the city were officially segregated and designated for African American and Hispanic students, particularly those learning English (who were not allowed to enroll in other schools until they were deemed fluent). These schools were typically funded at lower levels than other schools and had larger classes. As a result, African American and Hispanic students in the city had lower rates of literacy and higher dropout rates than their white counterparts in wealthier neighborhoods. While such segregation was devastating morally, physically, and economically to African Americans and Hispanics, it also lead to the development of close knit communities and networks of community-based organizations on the East side that still exist today and remain active in local education politics .

After *de jure* segregation was abolished by Brown v. Board of Education, Hill ISD began to reluctantly dismantle its segregation policies. By 1968, however, the U.S. Department of Justice sued the district for continuing segregation. By 1979, a Consent Order was put in place by a federal district court after being negotiated by the district, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund (MALDEF). It provided for new schools on the East side, affirmative action policies in district hiring, bilingual programs, and busing of students to and from East side schools. Under these policies, which were often accompanied by community resistance and conflict, segregation in East side schools was abated. In 1986, however, the district was released from the order and ended busing for desegregation.

After the end of desegregation, Hill ISD began implementing reform initiatives to improve resegregated low-income schools without deliberately changing enrollment patterns. These included magnet programs, additional resources, training for principals and teachers, curriculum reforms, and whole school reforms. They were accompanied by myriad reforms and policy initiatives emanating from state and federal agencies. Thompson Elementary was involved in many of these efforts, including being designated a district Blueprint School in 2002. Under the initiative, Thompson had received instructional coaches, training, and technology support, but was also subject to new curricular and instructional requirements. The middle school and high school in its feeder pattern were also among those threatened with closure from the state for poor academic performance in 2009.

Thompson is a large school with a challenging student population. In 2009, it enrolled 710 students in grades prekindergarten through 5. Between 2000 and 2009, the composition of the student population began to shift toward high proportions of Hispanic students, English language learners (Spanish was the predominant first language), and economically disadvantaged students. In 2000, 75% of Thompson students were Hispanic. That proportion increased steadily to 86% by 2009. Their proportion of economically disadvantaged students also increased from 84% to 97%. The most marked change, though, was in the proportion of English language learners. In 2000, 53% of students received this designation; by 2009, that proportion had increased to 73% (see Appendix I for full student and teacher demographic tables). Many of these students were

from immigrant families, and moved into and out of the school year-round. Its mobility rate in 2009 was 26.5%.[21] The principal noted that, although most of their Spanish-speaking students were from Mexico, they had been enrolling an increasing number of students from Central America. They also had had an influx of refugee students from Iraq who spoke neither Spanish nor English.

The current principal came to the school as an assistant principal in 2003, during Thompson's participation in the Blueprint initiative. She became principal three years later. She had herself come from a low-income, migrant family. She held high expectations for her teachers, and had worked to reduce teacher turnover. When Thompson became a Blueprint school, new administrators were brought in (including the current principal) and teachers were required to reapply for their positions, competing with other teachers in the district. At that point, a number of new teachers entered the school. The proportion of beginning teachers (i.e., those in their first year of teaching) declined from 14% to 10%. The proportion of veteran teachers (with more than 20 years experience) simultaneously rose from 5% to 12%. The experience of the faculty varied considerably between 2000 and 2009, when 6.5% of teachers were beginners, 11% were veterans, 54% had one to five years of experience, and 24% had six to ten years of experience.

The principal described the staff as committed and focused on the goal of raising student achievement. She held high expectations for teachers, and had tried to build a culture of personal accountability and focus on results. She saw her role as not only

establishing goals and expectations, but also providing resources needed to meet them. She commented,

> We've built a very strong environment where we have a lot of commitment to each other. I tried to establish a school that's supportive, but very realistic [about] why we're here. Yet, I try to be understanding about [teachers'] work and their challenges. I try to be resourceful to get them the supports that they need, and to manage our money very well and our budget very well so we can make sure that the instructional materials are there and the support staff is there to make their jobs a little bit easier.

Similarly, her priority was maintaining teachers' focus on student achievement results. She expected a high level of dedication toward that end. As she noted,

> We start with very clear expectations about [a teacher's] job. These are your students, your commitments. Think of support and interventions and small group pullouts as the bonus and the extras to support you. But at the end of the day and the last day of school, we're going to look at your roster and your scores. So that accountability piece … that's really the bottom line.

Teachers also described the staff as dedicated, and noted the high expectations and unique challenges they faced given Thompson's student population. They frequently mentioned student issues that arose on a daily basis emanating from language barriers, limited prior academic knowledge, and student mobility. They commented that these issues affected not only instruction and learning, but also students' relationships with one another and the overall school climate. They also noted some of the challenges within the staff itself. The school had had a history of high turnover, which had improved in recent years. Teachers also reported that they were frequently reassigned to different grade levels and classrooms within the school, which could also be disruptive. While the

reasons for this were not entirely clear, frequent changes in student enrollment due to their high mobility levels appeared to be a factor.

In 2006, when the current principal assumed leadership of Thompson, the school received its first ever Recognized rating under the state accountability system. That same year, Hill ISD's Blueprint initiative began to shift to a focus on high school redesign. Resources had been gradually shifting toward secondary schools since 2004, when the Blueprint program was expanded to include middle and high schools. By 2006, most school improvement resources in the district were being dedicated to the new High School Redesign project being funded by the Gates Foundation.

Previous Experience with Performance Pay.

Along with their participation in the district's Blueprint initiative, Thompson received Texas Educator Excellence Grants (TEEG) funding from the state in 2007 and 2008, $100,000 in 2007 and $120,000 in 2008. The following year, they entered the Hill ISD performance pay program. Their participation in TEEG provided a framework for Thompson teachers to make sense of performance pay as enacted in Hill ISD.

Under this program, Thompson faculty and staff created their own performance pay program, following state guidelines, which was approved by the district. They elected to provide performance awards to teachers at all grade levels who attained goals in reading and mathematics, as well as for attending faculty meetings and participating in campus professional development (Thompson's TEEG plans are included in Appendix J). In the first year, goals were set as whole-class passing rates on TAKS for grades 3-5 and

on local benchmarks or other literacy assessments for grades prekindergarten through 2. Goal passing rates for prekindergarten through second grade were differentiated by grade level, but were identical at each grade for grades 3-5. Special education teachers were also eligible for awards based on the SDAA (State Developed Alternative Assessment for students with disabilities) in the first year and individualized education plans in the second. Award amounts were between $2,000 and $2,500 (the highest being for teachers in grades 3-5, who taught TAKS tested grades, and were considered as more directly responsible for the school's overall performance ratings). In the second year, the incentive plan remained essentially the same, except that teachers in grades 3-5 were given the option of meeting a percentage increase in passing rates for their classes instead of only a whole-class passing rate (e.g., 82% passing or 75% gain in number passing). As part of their plan in each year, the school had to specify a "contingency plan" for redistributing any funds that were not awarded to teachers who did not meet goals. In both years, Thompson opted to divide any excess funds evenly among teachers who did meet goals.[22]

The Thompson teachers interviewed reported dissatisfaction with their participation in TEEG. Several teachers commented that the whole-class passing rates were difficult to achieve at all grades and with the school's high proportion of English language learners. A second grade teacher explained, "A hard thing with the TEEG grant was that it had a quantifiable growth [objective], and with primary grade levels, kids will kind of blossom at different times. You might have someone in first grade [who] doesn't

[make] a great reading jump until they hit second grade." A TAKS grade teacher also noted, "I was teaching a transition class, so I had only four kids who had been in English before. Previously, they'd all been in a class that had been taught in Spanish. So to get a big percentage of your class to pass an English test, when they've never had that language before, written down, was pretty tough."

Another aspect of TEEG they commented on was the potential for competition to develop among teachers due to the contingency plan. In the first year, some teachers did not meet performance goals, and those funds were redistributed to teachers who did. At this point, teachers realized that individual awards could be increased for teachers meeting goals if some teachers did not meet their goals. Although the teachers noted that there few conflicts on this issue, they were wary of its ramifications. A third grade teacher commented, "There was a pot of money that all the teachers were going to split. The more teachers that got it, the less money everyone got. And the only thing that kind of scared me with that is that there's incentive to not give your partner something. [If] they don't get it, I might get more money."

Introduction to Hill ISD's Performance Pay Program.

As the TEEG program ended in 2009, Thompson began participating in Hill ISD's performance pay program the following year. The school had been considered by the Steering Committee for participation in the program's first year. The principal had attended informational meetings in the spring of 2007, along with administrators from 17 other schools. At that point, the school was not invited to participate per se, but was under

consideration by the committee for participation. She was later informed that Thompson was an "alternate," and could be invited to participate in the event one of the invited schools declined. There were other alternates as well, so the school was not invited until the program's third year.

As happened at McCoy, staff from the program office introduced the program to teachers through a presentation and discussion session at the school just before the 2009-2010 school year began. Program staff returned to the school soon afterward for a second meeting in which teachers voted to participate. Only two teachers voted not to participate. According to the principal and assistant principal, these teachers had concerns that the incentives would disrupt teachers' collaboration and that the program would be too time-consuming. Because the program differed in important ways from the TEEG program, the principal was confident that her teachers would support the program. She commented,

> I knew that it would be accepted well. I knew that the perspective would be [that] we're already working so hard. The financial incentives and the different components of the program were just really aligned to what we believed in. My push was for just having that incentive for teachers, a financial incentive to be rewarded for their successes.

For her part, the principal and assistant principal viewed the program as fitting into their goals and teachers' existing practices in planning instruction collaboratively within grade levels. The assistant principal commented that, "My first thought was that everything that they're asking us to do, we do it anyway. So, why not participate?" She also thought that the program could help to bolster their efforts to raise student

achievement. She said, “It was a set framework for getting teachers, especially teachers who may not be as strong as we would want them to be, to get the students where they needed to be.” The principal also felt that the program, especially the student learning objectives component, could enable teachers to pursue goals beyond those demanded by TAKS. As she explained,

> What I was hoping to gain was that teachers focus on their best practices, and focus on their class, and be able to identify the goals that they have for their class. I think we're driven by TAKS so much, we're driven by district assessments so much, it seems to be the focus. So the idea of teachers developing their own objectives for their class and being able to narrow down a little bit [on] what they felt their class really needed to be successful, and pull down from just the test. I think I felt was getting more into depth about what students really needed to learn. And so it boiled down to the [student learning] objectives.

The teachers interviewed commented that, after their experiences with TEEG, they were intrigued by aspects of the Hill ISD performance pay program that were different from that program. One important feature was the recruitment and retention stipends, which were not part of their TEEG plan. One teacher noted that those stipends were her “favorite part of it.” Explaining the value of these stipends to them, another elaborated,

> The retention stipend was a big thing because, it’s like, we are here. We’re putting in the time. Whether you’re making great gains or maybe your gains aren’t as strong as others, the fact that you are here, and you’re committed, and you’re showing up every day, and you are here for the kiddos, that felt good to get that pat on the back. Because the last two times around with the other grant, I didn’t receive those.

The teachers also pointed to differences in the performance objectives included in their TEEG plan and the Hill ISD program. In particular, the student learning objectives

were attractive to them because it rendered the program "not just all TAKS-based." The learning objectives also provided opportunities for them to, in their words, "customize" the program to their own goals, interests, and students' needs and capabilities.

Finally, like the teachers at McCoy, the teachers at Thompson were motivated to participate, in part, by the prospect of earning additional compensation. In contrast to their TEEG plan, in which the maximum amount a teacher could earn was $3,500, the Hill ISD program offered the opportunity to earn up to $9,400 (depending on experience, tenure at the school, and participation in Take One!®). All the teachers interviewed noted that this was a significant amount of money. As one commented, "It's significant enough to where you can go [to] a very nice, very far place during the summer with the people that you care about."

Perceptions of Program Purposes and Goals.

The teachers and administrators interviewed at Thompson articulated a number of ideas about the performance pay program's purpose, theory of action, and goals. The principal and assistant principal honed in on the goals of teacher retention and improving student achievement. The principal was uncertain about the specific ways in which the program could achieve these goals. She communicated a "wait and see" attitude toward it. The assistant principal communicated more clearly about the program's theory of action. She saw it as "a tool that I think is excellent in motivating teachers [to do] what they know how to do best, and providing teachers with support." She also viewed it, in contrast to TEEG, as not "… as competitive. It's more of a team building type tool to

help campuses be more successful as a professional learning community, versus Ms. Smith competing against Ms. Jones to get the money."

The teachers, by contrast, appeared unclear about the program's purpose and goals. They voiced many possibilities, and almost seemed to be developing a consensus during the focus group, as evidenced by this exchange:

> Interviewer: How would you describe what the district's goals for the program are?
>
> Teacher: To raise your [student learning objective]. Have our students improve.
>
> Teacher: Yeah students' success, I would say.
>
> Teacher: Students' success.
>
> [Agreement from others]
>
> Teacher: Raise our TAKS scores.
>
> Teacher: I think it's teacher retention.
>
> [Agreement from others]
>
> Teacher: It's a focus on the low socioeconomic schools.
>
> Teacher: Retention, I think, is related with students' success and I think if there's teacher retention, teachers stay here longer, and that's going to contribute to student success.
>
> [Agreement from others]
>
> Teacher: But the focus is really on the socioeconomic status of the schools that they're hitting.
>
> Teacher: Like they're not targeting, you know, [West side schools] or anything.
>
> Teacher: It's kids who have deficiencies already. How can we get the teachers to be [incentivized] to get those kids?

> Teacher: I think that what they're doing the most is that… I don't really like the whole incentive, that's kind of weird to me. But I think that schools at high risk, low socioeconomic problem areas should definitely get paid a little bit more.
>
> Teacher: It's combat pay.

Later in the interview, this line of discussion continued as a teacher remarked, "So maybe they did it so they could keep teachers within the district. That's what I think they did." To which another responded, "I think it is just purely teacher retention."

Examining these exchanges, the teachers seemed to assign purposes to the program that fit with their individual attitudes about the issues it should address. They did, however, eventually coalesce around the issue of teacher retention as a particularly important problem. The utility of retaining teachers was, for them, an issue more of resources and organizational dynamics than of assuring teacher quality by keeping high-performing teachers and eliminating low-performing ones. They saw recruiting and training new teachers (including experienced teachers new to a school) as an expensive and time-consuming endeavor that was best avoided. They also spoke about the benefits to staff cohesion and commitment of maintaining a team of teachers. As a second grade teacher noted,

> If you can keep a cohesive team, a core team there, you're going to have greater success because you're going to have more of a commitment to one another. You're going to build that team. You're going to have that pride within what you're doing. I'm looking at all these people, I'm saying I'm not going to let them down, and as a result, well, how best can I not let them down? You know, really focus in on my kids because I know they're going to go off to these other [grade levels].

Retention seemed especially important to these teachers given the high turnover the school had experienced in the recent past and the level of commitment demanded of them. On several occasions, they commented negatively on teachers who might view a position at Thompson as a "stepping stone" to schools with higher pay or more privileged students. In this respect, they saw the retention stipends as a valuable tool for limiting attrition to schools and districts with more resources. As a fifth grade teacher said,

> It's so difficult. In [a nearby wealthy suburban district], every teacher has an ELMO (document camera and projection system). Every teacher has a SMART Board™ (interactive whiteboard). Every teacher has an assistant. Every teacher has I don't know what. And I have a shower board. I just made my own video camera ELMO in my classroom. I mean, there's such a difference between schools. Once you gain the experience, you could easily quit this school. And go somewhere else where teaching would be much easier. So the retention [stipend] is huge.

Changes in Professional Decisions and Instructional Practices.

While the teachers at Thompson saw retention as the most important purpose of the program, their activities in implementing it centered on instruction by establishing and working toward student learning objectives. They did not enter into the program expecting it to lead to significant changes in instructional practices. Yet, in the process of creating student learning objectives, they came to view the program as having more instructional value. Although Thompson was only midway through its first year in the program at the time of data collection, the teachers and administrators interviewed noted a number of ways in which it had already begun to influence their practices. Unlike most of the McCoy teachers interviewed, these teachers were not reluctant to point out these changes or to attribute them to the program. At the same time, they noted challenges

emanating from other pressures in the school that made it difficult to sustain those changes.

Teacher Retention.

As discussed earlier, the teachers uniformly perceived the retention goal of the program to be important. As a Highest Needs school, Thompson teachers with four or more years at the school could receive $3,000 each year. Teachers in their first three years at the school could receive $1,000 each year. Like the McCoy teachers, they noted that, while the retention stipends would make remaining at Thompson more attractive, it would not deter them from leaving if they were unhappy there. One commented,

> It's not enough money that it's going to make you say, 'I'm going to stay here instead of going somewhere else, like maybe [a nearby wealthy suburban district].' But it's enough where you're kind of like, I like the people I work with and these kids. You get connected to these kids. [The stipend is] like getting that extra scoop of ice cream.

They further commented that the retention stipends were particularly important for schools with Thompson' student population. As one teacher noted, "With this school, there's a lot of stress. Knowing that you're going to come back and at least get $1,000 just for coming back kind of helps you from deciding to reapply to other places."

Instruction.

Like the teachers and principal at McCoy, the administrators and teachers at Thompson noted that the student learning objectives component had had the most impact on their instructional practices. Specifically, they focused their attention on more meaningful goals and promoted more alignment of instruction across grade levels.

However, they also noted ways in which these changes were difficult to sustain. They commented that the School-Wide TAKS Growth component had little influence on them because there was already enormous pressure in the school to increase performance on TAKS.

The principal was using the student learning objectives to focus teachers' attention on science achievement. She required all teachers to use a science content topic for one of their two objectives. For the second objective, she directed teachers to focus on reading, unless their students' reading performance was already high (as measured by TAKS or another assessment). Teachers with satisfactory reading achievement could select another content area. As at McCoy, teachers collaborated within each grade level to establish their objectives within parameters established by the principals (at McCoy, setting performance targets aligned with TAKS goals; here, focusing on certain content areas). Teachers in each grade-level team set the same objective in science. Some teams set identical second objectives as well. On other teams, teachers varied the specific topic within the content area their team had chosen. For example, the third grade team selected reading as the content area for their second objective. One teacher set her objective on fluency, while another set hers on vocabulary.

For the principal, these requirements were a way to maintain a focus on school-wide weaknesses within the structure of learning objectives that were set individually by teacher. She explained,

> I wasn't sure how that was going to work because we're so focused on TAKS that [I thought the program] was going to pull away [from that]. What helped me was

> that, overall, I knew our work at different grade levels. Primary [grades] has to be reading, it has to be a focus on reading. So, it gave me an opportunity to have input into where our campus has the needs. The other objective, very easily, was science. Science is one of our big, big challenges as well. The only reason we're not Recognized is because our science [performance] has been a challenge. So, I knew that, across the board, we have to start science at [prekindergarten]. We can't expect fifth grade science TAKS to be taught by just fifth grade teachers and [have students] pass. So for me the [student learning objectives], that component of it, was critical because now the focus is on reading and science.

She also commented on the opportunity the learning objectives provided her to focus instructional support staff on school-wide goals. Recall that librarians, counselors, instructional coaches, and assistant principals had been made eligible for the program. They also created student learning objectives and received stipends for meeting them. The principal recognized that this was a way to align their work with that of teachers. She explained,

> The big eye opener was that now I've got my library, my P.E. teachers, my coaches, my counselor, my AP really looking at instruction. So now my librarian is saying, 'Oh, I need to be in fourth grade classrooms because my target group is fourth grade students.' The librarian wants to do her library thing and she doesn't have the pressure of TAKS like the teachers do or the academics in any grade. So this really pulled her in there to help and support, and become part of the big team too.

The assistant principal agreed that she herself had become more involved with instruction. She commented that doing so had given her greater insight into teachers' instruction,

> My goals are integrated into what the teachers are doing. I'm focusing on one of our weak areas, which is kindergarten and first grade DRA (reading assessment) levels. So, I have specifically made that a priority insomuch as I even pull a small group of students once a week. I hadn't been doing that. I'd been going into the classroom, but not necessarily working with students. So, I've gotten more

> involved in the instruction piece. That gives me a close-up look at what kind of instruction is going on in the classroom as well.

The teachers interviewed highlighted several ways in which their instructional practices had changed in response to the student learning objectives and the administrators' efforts to focus those objectives on school-wide improvement goals. The teachers in TAKS grades (grades 3-5) had, at the principal's direction, set their objectives to align with their TAKS goals. For example, the fifth grade teachers focused on earth science because that was an area of weakness in the prior year's TAKS results. Part of the required process of developing the learning objectives was to identify specific elements from the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (the curriculum standards on which the TAKS is based) that formed the basis for the performance goal. Most of the teachers interviewed commented that doing this had prompted them to examine and consider the standards in their instruction more than they had done in the past. For one third teacher, this was a refreshing change,

> [I]t made me really look at the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, the state curriculum standards) a lot more. I really stopped and [thought], 'Okay, what do [my students] really need to know to meet this TEK?' Where before, you know, you sort of looked at the basal, you were looking at the IPG's, which is the district's recommended lesson plans. It was kind of hard to tell what you were supposed to be doing. The main focus was pass the TAKS. So you look at old TAKS tests and, you know, just look at an old test. Can they pass the old test? And you're just, you're basically putting them on training wheels so they can pass a test. You're not really teaching what the TEK is. You're looking at a test and trying to teach that test to them.

A kindergarten teacher agreed and contrasted the usefulness of the learning objectives in this process as opposed to the performance objectives contained in Thompson's TEEG plan,

> When we did the TEEG, it was, you want to show this much growth per TPRI or DRA. With this, there was a component within the TPRI that we had to attack instead of just trying to push these kids onto a reading level. You're breaking it down and doing more of its components, instead of just attacking the overall test.

The same teacher also commented on the way focusing more on the standards had helped her to look more deeply at her students' skill levels,

> It's kind of opened the campus's eyes a little more on how much depth can go into simple phrases. 'Your child needs to recognize up to the number 10.' What does that mean? Well, that doesn't just mean he can count on his fingers to 10. He can recognize a group of 10. He can count and stop at 10 and recognize that is 10. There's a lot more than just a simple sentence there. I know people that have been doing TEKS are kind of finding out there's just a lot more involved [to them] than what we've thought previously.

The teachers also discussed how the school-wide objective-setting on science had prompted them to think more about aligning their learning objectives, as well as other aspects of their instruction, both within and across grades. As a third grade teacher noted, "We've never really had a science test. So, that was kind of cool that we all got together, we all gave that same test. Now we're teaching, you know, teaching that vocabulary, which is going to, you know, it'll help the scores go up." Another teacher commented on the vertical alignment that had begun to come about in science,

> It's really brought us together because we're having to [think about] how this is going to have an impact on [the next grade]. How can it benefit where [the students are] going to? Because I'm not just going to throw out some random objective. I've got to figure out what's going to be the most benefit to them.

Although the program, specifically the student learning objectives, appeared to be bringing out many changes to instructional practices that were perceived positively, the extent to which these changes were altering instruction across content areas and grade levels was unclear. The principal noted, for example, that although the student learning objectives had brought new content to her work with teachers, the actual processes through which she worked with them remained unchanged. In other words, she was meeting with and observing teachers in the same way, but they were now talking about their learning objectives. Additionally, even though all the teachers interviewed agreed that they were more focused on standards and skills, they indicated that they were not doing so consistently, as evidenced by this exchange,

> Teacher: I think that a lot of people put science [on] the back burner sometimes and thought, 'Why should we if we were busy?'
>
> Teacher: Well, it's all about math, math and reading.
>
> Teacher: Yeah, math and reading [are] so important, especially in third grade, their first year of TAKS. But we're more focused on science this year. We do [science] with students every day.
>
> Teacher: [The student learning objective] forces you to implement it.
>
> Teacher: It forces you into that schedule to teach it.
>
> Teacher: Honestly, since we did the [learning objectives], even though I've been more focused, I forgot about it for a while. Even though I'm still teaching science, and it got me directed into the right area, and helped me look at things more closely, I stopped thinking about the money. It was like, 'Oh right! I need to teach to this test.' Or, I need to try to get them to pass this [test].

From this exchange, it seemed that some teachers in the school were putting their science objectives "on the back burner" to focus on preparing their students for TAKS. Only fifth grade teachers' students took the science TAKS. At least some teachers in other grades did not seem to be able to maintain their focus on science consistently given the pressures they were under to meet accountability goals in other subject areas.

Challenges in Implementing the Program.

Many of the difficulties mentioned by the Thompson teachers and administrators interviewed had to do with being new to the program. The requirements for the student learning objectives and the process of submission and approval seemed overwhelming for the teachers, who commented that they had expected and wanted more support from the program office. They noted that the program staff visited the school in September and October of 2009 (before learning objectives were submitted), and then again in January of 2010 (before student rosters for learning objectives were submitted). They described meeting with program staff in groups during their planning periods and after school, which they described as rushed. For the most part, the teachers described the quality of support as high; they simply wanted more of it. They also recognized that their confusion about program processes and requirements would likely fade as they became more familiar with it. As one teacher noted, "I think that, as time goes by and we become more familiar with the program, we won't need as much support once we figure out what we need to write."

The principal and assistant principal, for their part, were happy with the support they received from the program office. The assistant principal noted, in addition, that the program staff had become useful contacts for the school to the district central office as a whole. She explained,

> This program [is] kind of the liaison between central office and the campus so that if we don't have these resources, we can now call and say, 'You know, we really want to do this, but do you know of any departments or of anyone that we could call to make that happen?' And so, I think that type of contact or connection, so to speak, is going to be very helpful.

There was some evidence of more substantive challenges faced in working with the program staff arising from differences of opinion about relevant content and rigor. A second grade teacher described a conflict that occurred over the assessment her grade level had selected for their science learning objective,

> Teacher: They told us that our science test wasn't rigorous enough. I [thought], 'Really? What do you know about the second grade? Where are you getting this information from?' Because the only other second grade test I saw in science was a vocabulary test. For us, that's like a reading test. If your kids can't read, they're not going to be able to pass that test. And there's a lot of second graders who are just not there yet. [Agreement from others] But can they point from a flower to the word that says flower? Yes. To show that they know that that's a flower and this is where the water comes from. They use graphics, and that's what [our test] was. We did it all in graphics versus just a vocabulary word and the definition, which is what they were expecting. We [thought] that's not grade level work.
>
> Teacher: Was it accepted?
>
> Teacher: Yeah, it eventually was accepted.

It was not clear how this issue was resolved, but it demonstrated that program staff actively negotiated student learning objectives with the second grade teachers at

Thompson. Notably, the difference of opinion stemmed, in part, from the Thompson teachers' assessment of their students' capabilities versus those of the program staff. For the teachers, a vocabulary test would have been unfairly difficult because many of their students could not read or did not read well. The assistant principal also mentioned that, in some cases, program staff had suggested that objectives lacked rigor. According to her, however, they typically suggested different approaches, such as using tiered performance targets, that were acceptable to teachers.

The teachers interviewed at Thompson also mentioned concerns about the fairness of student learning objectives that were similar to those discussed by the McCoy teachers and principal. In particular, they discussed the ways in which assignment of students to teachers and classrooms could affect their success in meeting their learning objectives. The distribution of English language learners was a particular concern. These students at Thompson were placed in either bilingual or transitional classrooms. Students who spoke little or no English were placed in bilingual classes. As they gained proficiency in English, they were moved into transitional classes in which most of their instruction was in English. The teachers categorized students in both types of classes as being strong performers ("high") or low performers ("low"). Their concern, regarding student learning objectives, was having a disproportionate number of low students. This exchange between two teachers illustrated their concerns,

> Teacher: Some of the classes are transitional so, if you're a transitional class, then you tend to get most of the high Spanish speakers that are transitioning to English. So, sometimes other classrooms aren't getting those high

kids. So, then it's kind of tough for you to meet some of these requirements if you're grouping certain kids based on language.

Teacher: But that's the standard. That's how you do it.

Teacher: Right, but I'm saying that affects scores. When they do that, your scores are not going to be as high. I mean, when I taught transition, I was looking towards the end of the year [and thinking], 'This child is still spelling everything phonetically in Spanish. And I can't, there's no way they're going to pass a writing test in English so now what am I going to do? Now I have to move them back to Spanish.' You know, after you've been trying to teach them English and it's, it's a pretty tight rope.

What was notable about this exchange was that these teachers seemed to be working through a possible conflict, rather than reporting on one that had already occurred. The same dynamic repeated when the teachers discussed the impact that student mobility and teacher turnover could have on meeting their learning objectives,

Teacher: We got a new teacher and all of a sudden a bunch of my kids left. All my high kids went to another teacher. It was pretty close to the middle of the year.

Teacher: But, [the program staff] keep telling you, 'You can revamp [your student roster for your learning objective]. They keep telling you [not to] worry about it because you can change it later.

Teacher: Now that you mention that, I'm [thinking], 'Oh, I've got a new kid.' I have to test that person.

Teacher: I got two.

Because they were in their first year of participation, and had not experienced failure to meet learning objectives, they described these scenarios in hypothetical terms. Interestingly, though, it appeared that they were beginning to surmise some of the

problems that could arise, some of which the teachers at McCoy had already experienced firsthand.

Discussion

As Thompson Elementary was in its first year in the program, teachers and administrators did not yet have a great deal of experiences to draw on in their discussions of it. Yet, they had already begun to develop understandings of it that were shaping their responses to it. The most important lens through which they viewed the program was their student population, which presented myriad challenges. With a high student mobility rate and a large number of English language learners, they faced uncertainties and disruptions in their classrooms on a regular basis. In this context, it was difficult to establish objectives that were both rigorous and achievable.

Despite these challenges, the teachers and administrators at Thompson seemed to welcome the change in focus that were introduced by the student learning objectives, although they were already beginning to note ways in which implementation of those objectives could become difficult. With their high-poverty student population, they were highly focused on improving achievement on TAKS. The student learning objectives allowed them to attend to other goals, often ones that were more substantive in nature. Both teachers and administrators at the school embraced this opportunity, even though they expressed concerns that it could cause them to fail to meet accountability demands. In such cases, they seemed to be willing to set their program goals and incentives aside in favor of meeting student testing goals.

Experiences in Both Schools.

The experiences of teachers and administrators at McCoy Elementary and Thompson Elementary with Hill ISD's performance pay program were similar in many ways. Principals at both schools were pursuing school-wide student achievement goals (at McCoy, increasing overall passing rates on TAKS, and at Thompson, improving science achievement). They subsequently used the program to advance these goals, guiding teachers' program activities (specifically establishing student learning objectives) to fit within those frameworks. As was shown at McCoy (and beginning to emerge at Thompson), this combining of program and accountability goals sometimes created confusion for teachers when the two conflicted. In these situations, teachers put their student learning objectives "on the back burner" to work toward accountability goals.

Along with the retention stipends, teachers and principals at both McCoy Elementary and Thompson Elementary focused on the student learning objectives in their discussions of the program. This components was clearly the most salient and relevant aspect of the program for them and presented the greatest change to routine instructional practices. Teachers at both schools reported developing their learning objectives in collaboration with their grade-level colleagues, in contrast to the program's guidelines, which were based on evaluation of individual teachers' student data to identify goals. At McCoy this practice developed after their first year in the program, when teachers began to compare their student learning objectives, and the outcomes of them, with those of their colleagues. This was encouraged by the principal and fit with existing collaborative

planning practices. At Thompson, which was in its first year in the program, teachers collaborate on their learning objectives immediately at the direction of the principal. In both cases, though, teachers developed norms of setting identical student learning objectives within grade levels.

At times, teachers effectively lowered their objectives to match those of other teachers in their grade-level teams. This was done not to make it easier to meet their goals and earn awards, but out of a sense of fairness. They believed that, since they were teaching the same content to students at the same grade, they should all be held to the same expectations. These concerns about fairness were more frequently discussed by teachers and the principal at McCoy than by those at Thompson, perhaps because Thompson was new to the program and had not yet experienced such issues. Thompson teachers mentioned several ways in which factors beyond their control, particularly student assignments to teachers and student mobility, could affect the outcomes of their learning objectives, though, indicating that even in the first year of participation, these concerns were beginning to emerge.

Both teachers and administrators assigned numerous purposes and goals to the program, including improving low-performing schools, addressing weaknesses in student achievement, and retaining teachers. None, however, saw the program as being created chiefly to act as an instructional improvement initiative, as did the program staff and interviewees from the Steering Committee. Indeed, the most fundamental purpose for the program they perceived was increased teacher retention at high-poverty schools,

something not mentioned as an important outcome by program staff or Steering Committee members. Ironically, though, all the teachers interviewed commented that the program's retention stipends, while appreciated, would not alone induce them to remain at their schools.

Overall, teachers at McCoy and Thompson entered into the program with little knowledge about it or guidance from the program office or the Steering Committee in understanding it. Their interactions with program staff were limited and they had no direct communication with the Steering Committee (as noted in Chapter 5, most did not even know that the committee existed). In this context, the principals provided frameworks for acting on the program within their schools. They fit the program into their existing school-wide improvement goals and priorities, directing their teachers' student learning objectives toward those goals. As teachers developed and pursued student learning objectives, they changed their instruction in ways that were sometimes significant and sometimes marginal. For teachers in TAKS grades, these changes were difficult to sustain in the face of accountability demands that were more seen as a higher priority. At the same time, their experiences brought up numerous concerns about fairness, which affected their perceptions of the program and the credence they assigned to it. All of these experiences have important implications for our understanding of performance pay policies and their implementation in schools, which are discussed further in Chapter 8.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

This study was designed to examine the meanings actors at multiple levels of the school system, teachers, school administrators, district administrators, and policymakers construct about performance-based compensation policies and to better understand how those meanings influence their interpretation of it. To that end, I conducted a qualitative study of two schools implementing a performance pay pilot program in an urban school district in Texas. As my research questions were focused on implementation and interpretations of performance pay, I used a sensemaking framework to guide data collection and analysis. In this chapter, I first summarize findings across cases - the Steering Committee, the district program office, McCoy Elementary, and Thompson Elementary. I then discuss these findings with regard to sensemaking and sensegiving. Finally, I discuss implications for theories of policy implementation, performance pay policies, and research.

Summary of Findings

For this study, I interviewed teachers, school administrators, district central office staff, and district policymakers about their understandings of and experiences with a pilot performance-based compensation program. Findings across the respondents and cases can be organized broadly into their understandings of the program's purposes and goals, and the impact of the program on practices in schools. Two other broad themes emerged across respondents and cases that warranted particular attention. One was the impact of the state accountability system on teachers' and school administrators' implementation of

the program. The other was the ways in which fairness came to be defined by teachers and the effects of those definitions on program implementation.

Understanding of Program Purpose and Goals.

The Steering Committee designed and oversaw Hill ISD's performance pay program. Messages about its purposes, goals, and theory of action emanated from this group. The messages themselves were often conflicting and unclear, reflecting the contested meanings within the committee. The members brought different intentions and goals for the performance pay program. Business interests emphasized the purpose of using compensation to directly change behavior and transform the teacher workforce. The district program director and the president of the teachers association, on the other hand, saw it as a means to improve instruction and teachers' working conditions. In part as a result of the higher representation of educators on the committee, this latter perspective dominated the program's implementation. The Steering Committee's lack of consensus about the program's purpose and goals was later reflected in the program's implementation in the schools and the central office. At each level, implementers created different understandings of the program's focus and vision, using it to further existing agendas and initiatives.

The program office viewed the program almost exclusively as an instructional reform initiative, consistent with the dominant views on the Steering Committee. For them, the program's financial incentives were an almost secondary consideration. They

saw the instructional supports they provided as the key to creating change and improving instruction.

The teachers and principals interviewed at McCoy Elementary and Thompson Elementary, as a result, received messages from the central office and the Steering Committee about the program's intentions and objectives that contained little clarity. On the one hand, the program staff deemphasized the program's financial rewards and encouraged teachers to concentrate on making instructional improvements and setting high expectations for student learning. On the other hand, the performance-based incentives, by their nature, suggested that teachers should focus on earning rewards. With few clear and consistent messages from policymakers or policy intermediaries, teachers and school administrators interpreted the program according to their own ideas about important outcomes, and then shaped it to fit their situations.

Impact on School Practices.

Policymakers and policy intermediaries had limited understanding about how the program was being implemented in schools to guide their decision making about the program's direction. The Steering Committee had little direct communication with teachers, and contested meanings within the Steering Committee were sometimes negotiated through experimentation with the program's structure. While some teachers understood this to be the nature of pilot programs, others became disillusioned when new requirements or processes affected them negatively.

Program staff were more attentive to school-level issues, and had direct (though still rather limited) communication with teachers. However, they failed to realize that school administrators and teachers would adapt the program to fit their needs. Instead, they expected fundamental changes in practice. Yet, the vision of instruction promoted within the program was rather narrowly focused on goal-setting, as opposed to broader changes in practices or teachers' knowledge that could lead to further improvements in other areas of instruction (Elmore, 2004). Their expectations for changes to instructional practices that would lead to significant improvements in school-wide student achievement seemed somewhat unrealistic given the highly specified nature and limited number of student learning objectives each teacher established and pursued. While program staff encouraged teachers and school administrators to use the student learning objectives as a vehicle for analyzing student data, monitoring progress, and developing professional learning communities, there was little in the structure of the program itself to ensure such practices. They also failed to acknowledge the other messages communicated by the program (namely, the focus on financial rewards) and the reality that the program would be integrated into, rather than replace, existing practices. As a result, the program staff were frustrated with the pace and scope of change, and assumed it was the result of a lack of competence or motivation on the part of school administrators and teachers.

Teachers and school administrators appeared to be making few sustained changes to significant aspects of instructional or organizational practices in response to the program. Having developed their own understandings of the program's purposes and

goals, the principals at McCoy and Thompson used it to advance school-wide goals. Teachers incorporated the student learning objectives into their existing norms, setting goals collaboratively within grade levels, rather than individually, as espoused by the program's structure and guidelines. In a sense, the student learning objectives became team, rather than individual goals. While many teachers interviewed described ways that the learning objectives had influenced their instructional practices, they were typically reluctant to attribute these changes to the program. In some cases, the changes they described were relatively minor (e.g., reviewing syllables once a week). In other cases, they had the potential to lead to changes that could have a greater impact on students' learning (e.g., dedicating more instructional time to science), but were difficult to maintain throughout the year considering other instructional pressures.

The one area in which the program appeared to have been more influential was on teachers' retention decisions. Several of the teachers interviewed described having considered leaving their schools, but had decided against it, in part, because of the retention stipends they received by staying. Others indicated that the stipends might make them "think twice" about leaving their schools. At the same time, they uniformly responded that retention stipends alone would be inadequate if they were dissatisfied with their working conditions (i.e., school leadership, relationships with colleagues). They appeared to view retention stipends as recognition for their efforts and commitment, rather than as enticements.

Pressures from the Accountability System.

Although program designers and intermediaries expected fundamental shifts in instruction and motivation, teachers in TAKS grades reported finding it difficult to prioritize their student learning objectives over accountability goals, which carried higher stakes for their students and schools. The principals at McCoy and Thompson directed teachers to set their student learning objectives in particular ways in order to meet school-wide performance goals. At McCoy, the principal wanted the school to achieve higher accountability ratings, which entailed higher TAKS passing rates for each teacher. Teachers were thus directed to set performance targets at levels that would be difficult for all of their students to meet. In the case of Thompson, the principal had teachers at all grades focus on science to improve science achievement throughout the school. For third and fourth grade teachers, these objectives were not directly relevant to the content on which their students would be tested. Teachers seemed to understand and support these goals, but some reported setting their learning objectives, and the accompanying financial awards, aside in favor of preparing students for TAKS.

Within the context of Texas and Hill ISD, the state accountability system seemed particularly difficult to compete with for teachers' attention. Especially for teachers in grades 3 through 5, preparing students to pass the TAKS exams was their primary instructional objective. The design of the performance pay program did not obviously undermine or compete with the accountability system. In fact, it was intended to complement it in many ways (i.e., through the inclusion of awards for school-wide

growth on TAKS, the requirement that teachers in TAKS-tested grades have at least one student learning objective based on TAKS, and the requirement that learning objectives be aligned with TEKS). Yet even when teachers' learning objectives did not directly conflict with TAKS goals, adapting them to school-wide accountability goals sometimes heightened, rather than lessened, their confusion over the goals to which they should attend. This was the case at McCoy when student learning objectives were aligned with school-wide TAKS goals, but resulted in demands on them to increase the performance of low-achieving students by very high margins. In these situations, teachers felt pressured not only by the demands of the accountability system, but also by the possibility of not earning performance incentives.

Fairness.

What was apparent in the experiences of these teachers and school administrators with Hill ISD's performance pay program was that there were a number of issues that could interfere with their success in meeting their performance goals. At McCoy, teachers pointed to students' differing pretest levels as an impediment to meeting test passing rate goals. Teachers there had also experienced, either themselves or as witnesses to their colleagues, instances in which student transfers or program requirements had rendered them unable to meet their objectives. At Thompson, teachers had yet to experience such conflicts firsthand, but were already able to identify potential complications that could arise due to their high student mobility and large proportion of English language learners, all of whom varied in the knowledge and skills with which they entered their classrooms.

Partly as a result of these types of issues, teachers at McCoy (which had participated in the program two years longer than Thompson) had begun to develop a common definition of fairness in their practices around student learning objectives. Collaborating on those objectives represented not only continuity with their existing practices, but also a forum for establishing equity within grade-level teams. Teachers set identical objectives out of a sense of shared responsibility for all the students at their grade level. They thought of themselves as teams in which everyone shared the same responsibilities, and so should be held to the same expectations. Within that context, lowering performance targets from levels suggested by one's student data was not thought of an attempt to "game the system" to earn rewards for oneself. It was thought of, instead, as a way to equalize opportunities across the team so that everyone could earn them.

Sensemaking and Sensegiving about Performance Pay in Hill ISD

The sensemaking framework used here was helpful in bringing to light differences between these groups of actors, and in understanding how the different views of these groups interacted in implementation of the program across levels of the system. Actors at each level - school, central office, and the Steering Committee - engaged in both sensemaking and sensegiving in their enactment of Hill ISD's performance pay program. These processes were examined from both the "bottom up" and the "top down" to create a narrative of sensemaking throughout the system.

This study of the implementation of performance pay at multiple levels of a district system was informed by and structured around theories of sensemaking. Sensemaking is the development of accounts of disruptive events that enable people to explain these events in coherent ways. When applied to policy implementation, it involves collaborative meaning construction based on familiar frameworks, gatekeeping to select certain policy messages in and leave others out, and the negotiation of technical and practical details so that constructed meanings of policies are translated into concrete actions (Coburn, 2001a).

Sensegiving, the corollary to sensemaking, is the process of attempting to influence sensemaking toward a particular interpretation of an event (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). It involves not only crafting and transmitting messages about an event (in this case, a pilot program), but also engaging in such activities as storytelling to communicate a vision, and structuring activities to guide behavior (Maitlis, 2006).

In situations of complex change within institutions, these two processes, sensemaking and sensegiving, occur simultaneously as events unfold (Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994). In Hill ISD, policymakers were continually making sense of the program as they experimented with different requirements, but they were also responsible for communicating their vision to administrators and teachers in schools. School practitioners had to construct understandings of the program that fit within their practices and environments. Principals also played an especially important role as sensegivers to teachers.

Both sensemaking and sensegiving about Hill ISD's performance pay program began with the Steering Committee, which designed and oversaw the program. They viewed the program through the lens of broad systemic and cultural changes in education. These respondents framed the program with regard to their own backgrounds and interests, and focused on parts of the program that best fit those interpretations. Members held sometimes opposing views, though, about the program's purposes and goals, resulting in different, and sometimes conflicting, expectations for its effects on teachers and teaching. They came to a weak consensus around instructional support, but the program they crafted addressed this narrowly and included other types of incentives as well.

The program staff were also well placed to communicate their vision of the program. For their part, program staff understood the program almost entirely as an instructional support initiative, and de-emphasized the role of its financial incentives. Central office administrators were largely influenced by their direct work with teachers and school administrators and their goals of improving instructional practice throughout the district.

The visions of these policymakers were communicated to teachers chiefly through the structure of the program itself - its components, incentives, and requirements - which reflected multiple goals and purposes. It subsequently relayed a somewhat incoherent message to teachers and school administrators about where their attention and efforts should be focused. Other than enacting the policy, the Steering Committee and the

program office engaged in little active *sensegiving* about the program. That is, they provided a great deal of information to principals and teachers, and strove to make themselves available to them. Yet, they did little to actively shape principals' and teachers' understandings of the program's purposes and of their vision for changing instruction, focusing instead on providing information about program processes, requirements, and activities.

The Steering Committee communicated with teachers only through formal means, such as brochures and web sites. Their most direct and extensive communication was with the Board of Trustees and other district stakeholders (such as the Chamber of Commerce Task Force on Compensation). For the most part, they relied on the program office to communicate messages to teachers and school administrators, who engaged in more frequent direct communication with teachers and school administrators. However, the program staff's vision of broad instructional change was somewhat covert. Discussions of changing instructional practice or cultures of teaching were not visible in any materials provided to teachers, and no teacher or principal described the district's goals for the program in terms similar to those used by the program staff and the Steering Committee.

In this context, principals emerged as key sensegivers for teachers. There were no other districtwide performance pay initiatives, and only a few similar differentiated compensation practices (such as bonuses for advanced degrees and National Board certification) to frame teachers' interpretations of the program. The principals of both

schools framed the program around the school-wide goals they were already advancing. For the principal of McCoy, it was to increase the school's accountability rating. The Thompson principal's goal was to improve science achievement (as a means of increasing overall performance in the accountability system). The two principals crafted directives on implementing learning objectives (at McCoy, basing them on TAKS passing rates needed for higher ratings; at Thompson, setting one objective in science at all grade levels) to tailor the program to those school-wide goals.

In this way, the principals were not only sensemakers in implementing the program, they also emerged as important sensegivers shaping teachers' understandings of it. They were able to guide teachers' activities in connection with the program, and could actively monitor their progress. As instructional leaders, they also had high degrees of perceived expertise and credibility among their teachers, characteristics necessary for effective sensegivers (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). Program staff, on the other hand, were not always perceived as credible experts by teachers, who sometimes questioned their guidance.

Teachers received all of these messages, to varying degrees, and engaged in their own sensemaking about what the program meant for their practices and their classrooms. Following the processes Coburn (2001a) described, they *constructed meanings* about the program based on existing school-wide goals, existing norms of collaboration, and the unique needs and characteristics of their students.

Teachers engaged in *gatekeeping* by focusing almost exclusively on the student learning objectives component. This component entailed the most direct engagement from teachers throughout the schools. Other parts of the program were simply not noticeable enough to be bracketed as distinct events that required interpretation (Weick, 1995). These included both components with which few teachers engaged or were affected by (mentoring, Take One!®), and those that were so similar to existing priorities and norms that there was little to distinguish them (school-wide TAKS growth). The retention stipends occupied an interesting middle ground. These incentives were noticeable, but they largely validated preexisting values (that retaining teachers is important), and did not appear to dramatically shift teachers' existing reasons for remaining at their schools (which were based primarily on working conditions).

Finally, teachers *negotiated technical and practical details* by creating norms for developing student learning objectives. They also developed internal guidelines for specifying objectives that accounted for potential obstacles they identified based on their own experiences and contexts.

Fragmented Sensemaking in Hill ISD.

The result throughout the system was what Maitlis (2006) characterized as *fragmented* sensemaking, in which sensegiving is characterized by low animation but high control, and sensemaking is characterized by the production of multiple, narrow accounts of events. Recall that sensegiving is not about dissemination of messages, but about shaping and influencing sensemaking. Thus, *animation* refers to a continuous,

intense flow of information about how implementers should interpret and understand events. *Control* refers to communication from sensegivers that is organized, systematic, and private (i.e., takes place in private settings rather than in open forums).

The Steering Committee held a key sensegiving position as the lead policymaking group overseeing the program. They communicated their vision most directly to the program office, and engaged in little direct communication with teachers and school administrators. At the same time, they provided little thorough information to program staff about program goals and intentions. The program staff similarly held a potentially important sensegiving role as intermediaries between the Steering Committee and the schools. Yet, perhaps because of their own limited understanding of the program's complex goals, they also engaged in little active shaping of school administrators' and teachers' sensemaking about the program. Most of the information they provided to teachers and school administrators dealt with procedural and regulatory information. They expressed frustration that school practitioners did not seem to fully understand the instructional changes they were seeking, but they also engaged in little animated sensegiving to this effect.

Thus, the program's structure, requirements, and processes came to constitute the primary means of sensegiving to teachers. Teachers focused on the aspects of the program that were most relevant for them given their contexts, producing multiple accounts of the program's purpose and goals. These accounts tended to be loosely defined ("improving low-performing schools") and included narrow descriptions of the processes

through which the program would achieve its goals. Teachers also became highly reactive to the program's structure and changes in program requirements. The Steering Committee's experimentation with the D2 assessments, for example, relayed messages about program intentions that may have been unintended, but resulted in negative perceptions of the program among some teachers.

Implications for Policy Implementation

Fragmented sensemaking frequently leads to inconsistent implementation since actions are based not on a coherent, collective understanding of a policy's vision, but on "idiosyncratic interpretations of events," (Maitlis 2006 p. 39). In this case, the principals at McCoy and Thompson developed their own understandings of Hill ISD's performance pay program and adapted it to the needs and interests of their schools. Such adaptations of policies to school contexts may be problematic from the perspective of policymakers, especially those enacting reforms meant to transform school cultures and practices. For schools, though, adaptation is not only beneficial with regard to making new policies and programs relevant and effective for their unique contexts (McLaughlin, 1987), but is necessary to maintain coherence (Honig & Hatch, 2004).

Sensemaking of new policies and programs undergirds policy adaptation by providing the means for school practitioners to create their own understandings of them that guide the ways in which they act on and integrate new policies and programs into their contexts. Yet, the findings from this study suggest the reverse, that policy adaptation also guides sensemaking. The principals and teachers at McCoy and Thompson had very

little time (about a week) to decide to participate in the performance pay program and to begin implementation of it. They had to begin acting on the program before they were able to construct thorough understandings of it. They instead constructed meanings about the program "on the fly," as they quickly developed ways to integrate it into their existing practices. These meanings, as well as the ways they worked with the program, changed somewhat as they gained experience with it and had opportunities to reflect on it.

Such time constraints can be an important factor in policy implementation, as school practitioners (as well as state and district administrators, in the case of federal and state policies) often must act on new initiatives very quickly to meet funding deadlines and requirements. In such cases, implementers have limited time to study new programs and develop understandings of them to guide their implementation. Instead, they turn to familiar frameworks and similar practices that enable them to respond rapidly. The risk in requiring such rapid responses is that school practitioners will focus on the superficial, easily understood aspects of a policy that can be quickly incorporated into existing practices rather than taking time to understand the core principals that underlie the policy (Cohen, 1990; Spillane, et al., 2002).

The findings here also suggest that sensemaking, and the implementation of policy that accompanies it, are influenced by the amount of attention implementers are able to devote to it. Teachers' attention to Hill ISD's performance pay program was driven not only by the salience and visibility of the program, but also by the number of other initiatives and pressures demanding their attention. Where the sensemaking of

teachers and principals about the program seemed to differ most from that of program staff and the Steering Committee respondents was in the extent to which each group was able to engage with the program. That is, the program staff and Program Director worked full time on the program. The Teachers Association President was highly invested in the success of the program. All of these actors had both the time and the wherewithal to devote significant time and attention to the program, much more so than teachers and school administrators, who had many other priorities and demands for their attention. Thus, they developed interpretations of the program's purpose and theory of action that were more sophisticated than those of the teachers and school administrators. They were able to do so, in part, because the program was their top priority rather than just one of many. Insofar as policy implementation is a process of learning that is developed through ongoing participation and negotiation of meanings (Coburn & Stein, 2006; Spillane, et al., 2006), the differences in time and attention that actors at different levels of the system are able to dedicate to that process will result in different understandings and expectations of new policy initiatives.

Co-Construction of Policy.

The findings here demonstrate as well that it is not only school practitioners who adapt policies. At each level, individuals make sense of policies based on their roles in implementation and the contexts in which they work. All of these meanings come into play as policymakers, intermediaries, and school practitioners incorporate policies into their own goals and practices. This was clearly seen in the multiple goals for performance

pay that were voiced by members of the Steering Committee and the district central office.

Datnow (2006) describes this kind of policy interpretation at different levels of the system as multidirectional, with multiple interpretations of policies taking place at different levels in the system simultaneously. When levels are tightly connected, the different ways of interpreting and acting on a policy, and the different expectations that are developed at each level, can lead to more comprehensive and nuanced understandings of the policy. However, when levels are loosely connected, they can also result in mixed messages, covert intentions, and lack of clarity about the policy's vision.

With little guidance to their sensemaking about Hill ISD's performance pay program, teachers at McCoy, like those at Thompson, were initially enthusiastic about the program, but their enthusiasm waned somewhat as they experienced outcomes and situations they perceived as unfair. Program staff, who viewed the program across schools rather than in connection with any particular school or classroom context, were frustrated by what they perceived as a lack of commitment and capacity among teachers and school administrators. They demonstrated little inclination to alter program components, requirements, or processes in response to schools' adaptations, focusing instead on providing more support to principals and teachers to enable them to implement the program with greater fidelity.

The Steering Committee, surprisingly, was more responsive to the frustrations of school practitioners, even though they communicated this in a somewhat removed way.

Since the program was being implemented as a pilot, they had the flexibility to introduce and eliminate activities as they wished. When the D2 assessments were met with opposition from teachers, for example, the committee eliminated them after only one year. However, their reasoning for implementing the assessments in the first place was not understood and confused some teachers. Likewise, their elimination was appreciated, but was not understood, creating even more confusion and even suspicion.

In loosely coupled school systems, such conflicts over meaning and confusion about intentions is endemic (Weick, 1976). In this environment, policymakers could benefit from engaging in what Maitlis (2006) referred to as *guided* sensemaking. In this form of sensemaking, sensegiving is animated and controlled. Policymakers actively engage diverse stakeholders in an organized, systematic manner to lead stakeholders in developing accounts of problems, policies, or events that are unitary and rich. This type of sensemaking leads to emergent series of actions that are consistent over time, rather than inconsistent, episodic actions. On its face, it appeared that the Steering Committee and the Task Force on Teacher Compensation and Support engaged in this type of sensegiving. They included different groups of stakeholders, including teachers. They engaged in extensive deliberation before and after implementing the program. However, their activities were restricted, and included few stakeholders other than those on each of the committees. Furthermore, there was little change in the individuals sitting on the committees over time. While this undoubtedly led to internal consistency in their own

sensemaking, it afforded them few opportunities to incorporate new perspectives into their decision making or to build knowledge of the program outside of these committees.

Policymakers could also be well served to tighten connections with principals. While it may not always be realistic for policymakers to expect to be able to completely control policy implementation in schools through sensegiving, principals are well positioned to do so. They serve an important gatekeeping function, providing interpretations of new demands to teachers and bridging or buffering their students and staff from external demands (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Insofar as policymakers can engage principals and help them craft understandings of new programs and policies that are consistent with their visions, they may be able to build more consistent implementation across schools. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that even though adaptation may make initiatives difficult to manage beyond the school level, sustainability of improvements depends on their integration into school-wide practices and structures (Coburn, 2003; Elmore, 1996).

Implications for Performance Pay Policies

The experiences of the teachers, school administrators, district administrators, and policymakers studied here suggest a number of implications for the implementation and design of performance pay policies. First, performance pay policies are not unique in the way they are received and implemented in schools. The financial incentives on which performance pay hinges and its emphasis on human capital strategies distinguish it from other reforms that emphasize structural and organizational changes within schools and

school systems. It is also a relatively new idea for teachers, principals, and district administrators to understand. However, the findings from this study suggest that it is received by school practitioners in much the same way as other school-wide reforms have been. That is, performance pay programs can be expected to be adapted, co-opted, and selectively attended to in order to fit within the contexts in which they are implemented. Such outcomes have been found with a variety of initiatives, from standards-based accountability systems (Louis, et al., 2005), to whole school reforms (Berends, et al., 2005; Corcoran & Christman, 2002; Amanda Datnow, 2006) to curricular reforms (Coburn, 2001a; Cohen & Hill, 2000; A. Datnow, Borman, & Stringfield, 2000). Comprehensive performance-based compensation programs such as Hill ISD's are premised on similar types of incentives and supports, so we can expect to encounter the same types of implementation behaviors.

Second, performance pay is but one of many influences on teachers' and school administrators' time and attention. School practitioners contend with a multitude of demands and priorities on a daily basis, from student needs, to curriculum requirements, to instructional planning (not to mention instructing students). New initiatives must be highly noticeable to break through the noise in schools (Amanda Datnow, 2006) The extent to which performance pay is able to become salient in teachers' minds on a regular basis may dictate how much of an influence it will have on practice and how much change it will ultimately initiate. Thus, performance pay policies must compete with other initiatives and demands for teachers' and school administrators' attention.

It is especially difficult for new initiatives to compete with accountability demands (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Amanda Datnow, 2006). It was not always clear to policymakers in Hill ISD when there may have been a conflict of interest between the new performance pay initiative and an accountability system that was so embedded in practice that it was almost taken for granted. Given the enormous influence held by TAKS and the state accountability system on nearly every aspect of public schooling in Texas (and the school sanctions that accompanied poor accountability ratings), it was understandable that teachers would make it a top priority. Yet, the willingness of some teachers to set aside goals for which they would be directly financially rewarded in favor of meeting accountability demands that offered no financial rewards for them was noteworthy.

Third, the findings from Hill ISD suggest that, as has been found in other research, financial incentives alone may not be sufficient to change teachers' instructional practices or improve student outcomes (Springer, Ballou, et al., 2010). Although all the teachers interviewed commented that they hoped to gain financial rewards from participating in the program, they reported few significant changes to their instruction as a result of it. The changes they did report were either limited in scope (e.g., devoting more instructional time to a topic), or were set aside when accountability pressures forced their attention away from content not directly relevant to TAKS. Teachers had a similar relationship to the program's incentives for retention, which were viewed as "pats on the back," and not as drivers of their behaviors.

These findings contrast somewhat with the economic model of performance pay (see Figure 3.1), which suggests that financial rewards are directly connected to behaviors. While the program's financial rewards did influence teachers' instruction in some ways, those responses were attenuated by existing practices in their schools and other demands. The rewards themselves also provided little guidance as to how they should alter their behaviors, even as they provided more guidance about outcomes for which they should strive. Thus, the tight connections between incentives and behaviors posited in the model are actually more akin to a set of loose couplings that can be mediated by a number of sources.

The findings do not suggest, though, that teachers' seemingly indifferent responses to the program's incentives resulted from resistance to performance pay. To the contrary, all the teachers interviewed were enthusiastic about the program, at least initially, and only two commented that they did not support the idea of performance-based compensation. They also do not indicate that teachers were incapable of setting and following through with goals, as one of the program administrators suggested. Teachers seemed to understand how their performance pay goals fit in with their instructional programs. Those goals, though, simply were not powerful enough to provoke substantial changes to their instruction, and there were too many other priorities that were deemed more important for the changes that did occur to be sustained.

In contrast to the assumptions of the program staff and the Business Representative about teachers' abilities to follow goals, the teachers' behaviors suggested

that they were quite rational and deliberate in their decision making. Given goals that prompted limited responses and faced with more pressing demands, they chose to prioritize accountability goals and other instructional needs over the performance pay program. It is likewise important to note that teachers' lukewarm responses to the retention incentives were not a result of disinterest in compensation. In focus groups, teachers demonstrated that they understood and attended to the intricacies of compensation structures in Hill ISD and its surrounding districts. Money mattered to them. It just was not the only, or even the most important, consideration.

Lastly, the concern that individualized incentives will undermine teacher collaboration was unsupported by the study. These data demonstrated exactly the opposite: individualized incentives were subsumed by collaboration among teachers. The student learning objectives were, in practice, team awards, as teachers at each grade-level set identical objectives. They were also, less directly, school awards since the principals made sure that every teacher's learning objectives aligned with school-wide goals. This enhanced coherence at the school level, but undermined the program's intention of individualizing compensation.

An important caveat to these findings should be noted here. Hill ISD's program was operating as a pilot. Schools were selected to participate, in part, based on having strong leadership to shepherd the program. It is likely that these schools had more structures and norms in place that promoted instructional coherence and staff cohesion (Bryk, et al., 2010; Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001). This seemed to be the

case at both McCoy and Thompson, where collaboration was a norm. Teachers in schools with less cohesion and fewer collaborative practices could very well respond differently to individualized incentives.

Implications for the Design of Performance Pay Policies.

Performance pay plans such as the one implemented in Hill ISD contain numerous components that combine incentives and rewards for performance with supports. The Hill ISD program included mentoring and professional development along with incentives for performance (both individual and school-wide) and recruitment and retention in high-needs schools. These types of plans draw on theories of human capital that promote comprehensive approaches to compensation that are aligned with systems for recruiting, retaining, and developing talent (Milanowski, 2008b).

This study indicates that a potential downfall of these types of programs is that they can become "blank slates" onto which everyone involved can assign their own goals and purposes. This can result in incoherence if resources and attention are not managed and focused well. Policymakers can mitigate this by developing clear ideas of how each component of a performance pay program addresses its larger goals and by making sure that each component is powerful enough to affect the changes they seek. In Hill ISD's program, the student learning objectives did not appear powerful enough to induce significant instructional improvements. Likewise, so few teachers participated in the Take One!® professional development component that it had little significance in these schools. It was also not clear how this particular component aligned with the other components in

the program. It was not tied to the mentoring component, and was not aligned with either of the performance incentives. It seemed to be operating largely independent of the rest of the program, which likely contributed to its diluted effect.

Human capital theories also suggest that strategies to build and sustain strong teacher workforces should be embedded throughout school systems (Milanowski, 2008b). The Hill ISD program, however, functioned independently from other human resource, instructional, and professional development programs in the district. As a pilot, it was being developed and tested for potential use throughout the district. The extent to which other related functions in the district, such as teacher recruitment and base compensation, could be changed to fit the program, though, was unclear. Layering this type of performance pay program on top of other practices that may or may not be aligned with it could lessen its potential to create change. On the other hand, greater alignment with other compensation and teacher development functions in the district could make Hill ISD's program more powerful and influential to teachers' work.

As discussed earlier, the individualized incentives in the Hill ISD performance pay program were subsumed by cultures of teacher collaboration. Considering the emphasis on, and encouragement of, whole school collaboration in many school improvement initiatives and its association with improved school performance (Bryk, et al., 2010), it may be more effective to build on collaborative professional communities in place in schools by using team-based incentives and awards. As discussed in Chapter Two, school-based performance awards have been implemented with mixed results on

teachers' practices. Team-based awards that apply to grade levels, departments, or other organizational subgroups have been used less. The findings from this study, as well as other research (e.g., Little, 1995), indicate that these subgroups may hold greater meaning and relevance for teachers than schools as a whole or their individual classrooms. Building on this culture could enable performance incentives to carry greater meaning for teachers while also enabling school administrators to use them to address grade-level weaknesses and needs.

This study also suggests that designers of performance pay policies should pay close attention to ways in which incentives and activities within these programs may be perceived as unfair. Most of the concerns about fairness voiced by the teachers in this study arose not from the attachment of financial rewards to performance or perceptions that teachers were being rewarded unjustly. Instead, they emanated from the details of how performance objectives were created and performance evaluated. The student learning objectives, which were meant to empower teachers to develop and pursue goals meaningful to their instruction, were, in practice, rife with possibilities for teachers to fail due to factors seemingly beyond their control. Teachers complained that being assigned too many "low" students, or too many students with language barriers could interfere with their ability to meet expectations. They also came to realize that student mobility could be a hindrance if they received new students midyear who they would have less time to prepare, or if high-performing students left their classrooms. All of these situations could (and did) cause teachers to fail to meet their goals by small margins.

While it may seem that these teachers should have disregarded these issues and focused instead on improving their instruction, such a suggestion ignores the validity and implications of their concerns. The highly specified and narrowly tailored nature of the student learning objectives made them relevant to only small parts of teachers' instruction, rather than the broader goals of the schools. Yet, they were prompting teachers at McCoy and Thompson to pay more attention to student assignments and mobility because those factors could impede their attainment of those rewards. In this way, their attention was being diverted from the larger goals of the program, improved instruction and student learning, to the performance measure of meeting the specific instructional goal. Baker (2002) notes that this diversion of attention away from "true objectives" leads to *goal distortion*, focusing on objectives that have little influence on an organization's primary goals and mission. To the extent that the goals incentivized by performance pay policies have, or are perceived to have, limited relevance for school-wide and systemic goals, they can divert teachers' attention away from those more important aims of education.

Goal distortion could also result in teachers seeking to avoid teaching students who could make it difficult for them to achieve their performance goals. Teachers at both McCoy and Thompson described ways in which the students assigned to them could prevent them from earning financial rewards. This was especially notable at Thompson, where teachers had yet to complete their first year in the program and begin earning rewards. They were already beginning to note these kinds of conflicts. Even more notable

was the fact that the students they referred to were those with language barriers, low prior achievement, and high mobility. Given that improving schools serving these very types of students was a focus of Hill ISD's performance pay program, policymakers should pay close attention to this possibility.

Finally, policymakers should attend to issues of competition, even though surveys of teachers suggest that this is not a problem in many performance pay plans (Springer, Ballou, et al., 2010; Springer, Podgursky, Lewis, Ehlert, Ghosh-Dastidar, Gronberg, Hamilton, Jansen, Lopez, Patterson, et al., 2008). This study suggests that even performance pay programs in which incentives are available to everyone can result in comparisons, if not outright competition, among teachers. Resentment or competition did not appear to be a problem in either school. However, a few teachers at McCoy noted that they felt some embarrassment when they did not meet their goals. The receipt of performance rewards seemed to them to label teachers who received them as "good teachers," while those who did meet their goals were, by default labeled "bad teachers." Such labeling, even if unspoken, could lead to resentment if those labels come to be viewed as inaccurate or lose their credibility. While this finding was not a prominent feature of either school's experience with Hill ISD's performance pay program, it is nonetheless notable given concerns about the impact of performance pay on teachers' working relationships.

Implications for Research

The findings from this research have implications for research on both policy implementation broadly, and implementation of performance pay policies specifically. For policy implementation, they bring to light several ways in which research could be expanded and refined. First, this study illuminates the need for more cross-level research on the implementation of policies. Policy implementation studies, particularly those utilizing cognitive frameworks, often focus intensely on the experiences of one group, such as teachers (e.g., Ingram, et al., 2004; e.g., Louis, et al., 2005), or the interactions between two closely connected groups, such as teachers and various non-system actors (e.g., Coburn, 2005), in order to deeply examine the complex processes of meaning making that transpire.

However, the creation and enactment of policies more typically occur between multiple groups of actors across system levels. The actions taken at one level can often greatly influence those that occur at others (Amanda Datnow, 2006; Honig, 2006a). Policymakers, of course, are influential actors as instigators, designers, and enactors of policies. Yet, their role as active participants in the implementation of policy, particularly in connection with the actions of school-level practitioners, is not well understood.

Often, policymakers have little interaction with practitioners, which leads to assumptions embedded in many implementation research designs that policies follow along pathways, from policymaker down to the practitioner (McLaughlin, 2006). This leads policymakers to be viewed as mere providers of policies or treated as context to the

implementation actions of others. However, they can play active roles as sensegivers in shaping the sensemaking of actors at multiple levels. Their meaning making about policies is also critical to understanding how policies are designed and introduced into school systems, which, as this study demonstrates, can be a powerful mechanism for sensegiving itself.

Second, the findings from this study similarly demonstrate the need for researchers to pay closer attention to the unique roles principals play in policy implementation. Principals often act as key intermediaries between teachers and policymakers enacting reforms by focusing attention and resources on new initiatives, as well as buffering their schools from initiatives that could interfere with existing practices (Bryk, et al., 2010; Honig & Hatch, 2004). The findings here expand on this research by clarifying that principals further act as critical sensegivers for teachers by providing them with frameworks for understanding and acting on ambiguous policies. They are particularly well positioned for this role, having credibility, authority, and intimate knowledge of teachers' practices and immediate instructional environments (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007).

Regarding research on performance pay, these findings point to the value of implementation studies that focus on the processes of implementation itself, rather than viewing it primarily as a means to explain findings on outcomes. As cognitive theories of policy implementation suggest, implementation is a complex process of organizational and group learning that varies over time and across contexts (Coburn & Stein, 2006;

Honig, 2006a). Viewed from this perspective, performance pay is not simply a new variable introduced into schools, but becomes part of the context in which teachers work. Because performance pay does not (typically) directly affect teaching practices, as do curricular initiatives or instructional programs, it is especially difficult to disentangle it from the myriad peripheral influences on teachers' work. Understanding the ways in which teachers respond to and act on this kind of indirect policy tool can give policymakers a more thorough picture of how these initiatives might be received in different environments, as well as what kinds of outcomes they might reasonably expect from them.

Finally, in order to develop rich understandings of how performance pay policies might influence teachers and change their practices, researchers and policymakers need rich data on their implementation. Many studies of performance pay have included implementation data derived from surveys of teachers that are intended to be used primarily to identify variables associated with successful outcomes (e.g., Jacob & Springer, 2008; e.g., Springer, Podgursky, Lewis, Ehlert, Ghosh-Dastidar, Gronberg, Hamilton, Jansen, Lopez, Patterson, et al., 2008). Unfortunately, these data are not always successful in explaining surprising or counterintuitive findings because they are unable to illuminate complex processes that result in unexpected behaviors. While generalizable data may continue to be necessary in research on performance pay as policymakers and researchers evaluate its effects and potential to induce significant and lasting changes in education, qualitative and historical data that are less generalizable, but perhaps better

suited to uncovering complex processes of implementation should play a greater role in this research as well.

Appendix A: Interview and Focus Group Protocols

Teacher Focus Group Protocol

Teachers were asked to complete the Teacher Focus Group Information Questionnaire prior to the focus group.

I'd like to start by talking about how your school started participating in the [program name] program.

- What do you remember about how the teachers here first learned about the program?
- What processes did you go through to decide to participate? *(if needed, probe about meetings, votes, presentations by district)*
- What did teachers in this school hope to gain by participating in [program name]?

The [program name] program has several components (*name if necessary)*. What are the most relevant components or activities for this school? Why?

How have you learned about the activities and requirements involved with [program name]? *(Ask for an example.)*

- What have been the most valuable sources of information?

What ways, if any, do teachers here work together that didn't happen before the program began? (E.g., looking at student data together, doing professional development work together)

How would you describe the district's goals for the [program name] program?

- How do you think the program is supposed to achieve those goals?
- How do those goals fit with the goals you have as a school?

For respondents in veteran schools:

- What changes, if any, have you noticed in the goals you set as a school since you started participating in [program name]?

What do you like best about [program name]? What do you like least?

What would you change about [program name]?

Is there anything else about your school's experiences with [program name] that you'd like to add?

Teacher Focus Group Information Questionnaire

How long have you been a teacher?
□ First year as a teacher
□ 1-5 years
□ 6-10 years
□ 11-20 years
□ More than 20 years

How long have you been a teacher in Austin ISD?
□ First year in district
□ 1-5 years
□ 6-10 years
□ 11-20 years
□ More than 20 years

How long have you been a teacher in this school?
□ First year in this school
□ 1-5 years
□ 6-10 years
□ 11-20 years
□ More than 20 years

Do you have other formal role(s) in this school or in the district other than classroom teacher? (E.g., instructional specialist, mentor teacher)
□ No
□ Yes – Please describe:
_____

What student populations do you teach this year?
□ Special education
□ English language learners
□ Gifted and talented
□ General instruction

What grade(s) do you teach this year? _____

Teacher Interview Protocol

I'd like to start by talking about your background in teaching.

- How did you get into teaching? (What made you decide to become a teacher?)

Now I'd like to talk about your school. How would you describe this school?

- What was it about this school that made you want to teach here?

I'd like to talk about your work as a teacher.

- What is most important to you about your work as a teacher?
- When do you feel most effective as a teacher?

Now I'd like to talk about your experiences with the [program name] program.

- What about the program is most relevant to you, personally?

For respondents in veteran schools:

- Let me ask you to think about any changes you've made as a result of participating in [program name]. What, if anything, do you do now, in terms of your teaching and your professional activities, that you didn't do before the program began?
- How, if at all, have you changed the goals you have for your students since starting participation in [program name]

For respondents in new schools:

- Your school is just beginning participation in [program name] this year, so I understand that the program is still new. But what, if anything, have you started doing differently in terms of your teaching and your professional activities, that you didn't do before this year?
- How, if at all, have you started to think differently about the goals you have for your students this year?

What else has influenced those changes, or the way you teach?

Now I'd like to talk about your career plans. When you first started teaching, how long did you expect to be in the classroom? *(If new teacher: As of now, how long do you plan on teaching?)*

(Probe on other career plans, if mentioned.)

When you first came to this school, how long did you expect to be here? *(If new to school: As of now, how long do you plan on teaching at this school?)*

(Probe on other school plans, if mentioned.)

How have those plans changed, if at all, since you started participating in [program name]?

Is there anything else about your experiences with [program name] that you'd like to add?

Principal Interview Protocol

I'd like to start by talking about your background.

- How long have you been a principal?
- How long did you teach before becoming a principal?
- What fields have you worked in other than education?

Now I'd like to talk about your school.

- How would you describe this school?
- What was it about this school that made you want to be the principal here?

I'd like to start by talking about how your school started participating in the [program name] program.

- What do you remember about how you first learned about the program?
- What interested you about [program name]?
- How did you go about introducing the idea of participating in [program name] to your teachers?
- What did you hope to gain for the school by participating in [program name]?

The [program name] program has several components. What are the most relevant components or activities for this school? Why?

How have you learned about the activities and requirements involved with [program name]? (Ask for an example.)

- What have been the most valuable sources of information?

How has the way you work with teachers changed, if at all, since starting participation in [program name]?

How would you describe the district's goals for the [program name] program?

How do you think the program is supposed to achieve those goals?

How do those goals fit with the goals you have as a school?

For respondents in veteran schools: What changes, if any, have you noticed in the goals you set as a school since you started participating in [program name]?

For respondents in new schools: How, if at all, have you started to think differently about school goals?

What have been the biggest benefits to participating in [program name]?

What have been the biggest challenges to participating in [program name]?

Is there anything else about your school's experiences with [program name] that you'd like to add?

Steering Committee Member Interview Protocol

I'd like to start by talking about your background. Tell me about what you do.

- *For business representative*: How did you get involved in education?
- How did you get involved with the Steering Committee?

I'd like to talk some about the background of the Steering Committee.

- How did the steering committee get started?
- What are the main responsibilities, currently, of the Steering Committee?
- How has the role of the Steering Committee changed since it was created?

Now I'd like to talk about the program itself.

- How would you describe the goals of the program? *(If not yet addressed, ask how the program got started.)*
- How have those goals changed, if at all?
- How do those goals fit in with other goals in the district?
- What, in your opinion, does the district hope to gain with [program name]?
- What does your organization hope to gain?

Now I'd like to talk about implementation of the program. How would you characterize teachers' experiences with [program name]?

How does your organization communicate with teachers, if at all, about [program name]? (May not be applicable to business representative.)

- What messages do you hope to convey to teachers about the program?

What would you say have been some of the greatest successes so far?

What would you say have been some of the biggest challenges so far?

How would you like to see [program name] develop in the future?

Is there anything else about your experiences with [program name] that you'd like to add?

District Central Office Staff Focus Group Protocol

I'd like to start by talking about the work you do here. How would you describe that?

- What are your main responsibilities?
- What do you know about how your positions in this office came about?

Now I'd like to talk about the pilot schools you work with on implementing [program name].

- How would you characterize teachers' experiences with [program name]?
- What are some of the differences you've seen in the way schools are engaged in the program? What do attribute those differences to?
- What are some of the biggest challenges schools have faced in implementing [program name]?

What has been helpful to schools in working with the program?

What are some of the biggest challenges you've faced in working with pilot schools?

What has been helpful to you in working with pilot schools?

What are the most important messages you try to convey to teachers as you work with them?

What kinds of feedback have you gotten from teachers about the program?

Now I'd like to talk about the big picture of the program.

- How would you describe the goals of [program name]?
- What, in your opinion, does the district hope to gain with [program name]?

What do you see as some of the biggest successes of the program?

What would you change about [program name]?

Is there anything else about your school's experiences with [program name] that you'd like to add?

Appendix B: Interview Coding Scheme with Frequencies by Case

Code Family	Code	Steering Committee	Central Office	McCoy Elem	Thompson Elem	Totals
Challenges to Implementation	Alignment with Other Programs	0	2	1	0	3
	Conflict with Accountability Goals	0	2	4	4	10
	Fairness	0	0	7	3	10
	Fit with Current School Culture	0	0	0	2	2
	Measuring Program Outcomes	3	0	0	0	3
	Principal Buy In and Support	0	2	0	0	2
	Principal Capacity to Implement	0	2	0	0	2
	Program Funding	2	0	0	0	2
	Setting Achievable Goals	0	0	3	2	5
	Setting Student Sample	0	0	2	0	2
	Student Backgrounds	0	0	2	3	5
	Systemic Capacity to Implement	0	2	0	0	2
	Teacher Buy-In and Support	3	2	0	0	5
	Teacher Capacity to Implement	1	1	0	0	2
	Time	0	0	2	1	3
	Writing and Entering Goals	1	0	0	1	2
	Total	*10*	*13*	*21*	*16*	*60*
Changes Resulting from Program	Decision to Transfer	0	0	2	1	3
	Instructional Practice	0	0	3	6	9
	Total	*0*	*0*	*5*	*7*	*12*
Effects of Incentives	Communication	*1*	*2*	*1*	*4*	*8*
	Competition	0	0	2	4	6
	Focus on Student Achievement	0	0	0	0	0
	Gaming	0	2	1	0	3
	Recognition	1	0	1	0	2
	Teacher Turnover	0	0	1	1	2
	Total	*1*	*2*	*5*	*5*	*13*

Code Family	Code	Steering Committee	Central Office	McCoy Elem	Thompson Elem	Totals
Goal of Teacher Retention	Award for Effort	0	0	0	1	1
	Combat Pay	0	0	1	1	2
	High Quality Teachers	0	0	0	1	1
	Team Coherence	0	1	1	1	3
	Total	*0*	*1*	*2*	*4*	*7*
Participation in Program	Decision to Participate	1	0	6	1	8
	Introduction to Program	0	0	5	3	8
	Prior Experiences with Performance Pay	0	0	0	2	2
	Total	*1*	*0*	*11*	*6*	*18*
Instructional Practices	Assessment	2	0	2	1	5
	Collaboration	0	1	3	7	11
	Data Use	1	0	0	1	2
	Focus on Student Achievement	0	0	2	0	2
	Goal Setting	1	3	5	7	16
	Total	*4*	*4*	*12*	*16*	*36*
Policy Environment	Central Office	1	1	0	0	2
	District Goals	2	1	1	3	7
	Outside Perceptions	2	1	0	0	3
	School Context	0	2	5	6	13
	Teachers Association	2	0	0	0	2
	Total	*7*	*5*	*6*	*9*	*27*
Program Purpose	Program History	*3*	*3*	*0*	*0*	*6*
	Attracting High Quality Teachers	1	0	0	0	1
	Changing Educational Practice	9	0	1	0	10
	Improving Low Performing Schools	0	0	2	1	3
	Improving Student Outcomes	1	0	2	1	4
	Improving Teacher Quality	1	0	0	0	1
	Increasing Teacher Compensation	2	0	0	0	2
	Instructional Support	2	4	0	0	6
	Retaining Teachers	1	0	1	3	5
	Rewarding Excellence	0	3	0	0	3
	Total	*17*	*7*	*6*	*5*	*35*

Code Family	Code	Steering Committee	Central Office	McCoy Elem	Thompson Elem	Totals
Program Components and Requirements	Mentoring	2	1	4	2	9
	Requirements and Processes	0	0	2	5	7
	Steering Committee Purpose	3	0	0	0	3
	Support	0	4	3	6	13
	Take One!®	0	1	2	3	6
	Total	*5*	*5*	*9*	*13*	*32*
Program Theory of Action	Changing Instructional Practice	0	6	1	0	7
	Retaining Teachers	0	1	1	0	2
	Rewarding Effort	0	0	1	1	2
	Rewarding Excellence	1	2	0	0	3
	Supporting Current Instructional Practice	1	0	1	1	3
	Team Building	0	0	0	1	1
	Total	*2*	*9*	*4*	*3*	*18*
Reasons for Participating	Financial Reward	0	2	4	5	11
	Improve Achievement	0	0	2	0	2
	Instructional Support	0	0	1	4	5
	Support Current Practices	0	0	2	3	5
	Teacher Retention	0	0	0	3	3
	Total	*0*	*2*	*9*	*15*	*26*
TOTAL		**51**	**53**	**91**	**103**	**298**

Note. Occurrences of codes can apply to comments or exchanges of any length within an interview transcript. Codes were not applied to documents or data other than interviews with study participants.

Appendix C: Hill ISD Strategic Plan Teacher Quality Priority and Strategies

Recommendation from Strategic Planning Panel on Priorities, Goals, and Performance Indicators to Hill ISD Superintendent

PRIORITY 4

Recruit, develop, and retain highly effective teachers and administrators.

Strategies

4.1 Develop and implement a comprehensive, long-range plan to provide greater supports and incentives to teachers, principals, and staff, and encourage highly effective teachers to continue service in our highest need schools.
4.2 Encourage continued enhancements to professional development, particularly in providing training that meets the specific needs, experience, and job descriptions of teachers and staff, and in providing internal career and leadership development.
4.3 Improve internal communications to ensure that all interactions between staff are characterized by mutual respect and dignity.
4.4 Ensure the campus reconstitution process does not result in loss of highly effective staff to other districts, other professions, or early retirement.
4.5 Achieve greater diversity in the district workforce through both recruitment and retention efforts.

Recommendation from Hill ISD Superintendent to Hill ISD Board of Trustees (text included in approved Strategic Plan)

PRIORITY 4

Staff

Recruit, develop, retain, and reward highly effective teachers and administrators.

Policy Alignments

EL-4 (Staff Treatment)
EL-5 (Staff Compensation)

4.1 Develop and implement a comprehensive, long-range plan to provide greater supports and incentives, including compensation, to teachers, principals, and staff, and encourage highly effective teachers to continue service in our highest need schools.
4.2 Encourage continued enhancements to professional development, particularly in providing training that meets the specific needs, experience, and job descriptions of teachers and staff, and in providing internal career and leadership development.
4.3 Improve internal communications to ensure that all interactions between staff are characterized by mutual respect and dignity.
4.4 Ensure the campus reconstitution process does not result in loss of highly effective staff to other districts, other professions, or early retirement.
4.5 Achieve greater diversity in the district workforce through both recruitment and retention efforts.

Appendix D: Consultation Agreement between Teachers Association and Hill ISD Administration

FY 2006-2007

1. Increase salary schedules 7.5%
2. Continue Health Insurance Funding (1.5%) ($5,900,000)
3. Add 8 Parent Support Specialists ($347,224)
4. Increase New Teacher Academy Daily Rate to $90.00 per day* ($160,000)
5. Agree on Payment for Required Training Outside of Work Year Only
6. Continue to work on Biweekly Direct Deposit proposal
7. Withdraw Bilingual Stipends for Classified Employees proposal
8. Withdraw Police Officer Contract proposal
9. Dedicate remaining funds to Fund Balance in FY 2006-2007; and
10. Support Board's authorization of available 4 cent in local M & O tax rate for 2006-2007 which will be dedicated for enhancing Fund Balance in 2006-2007

FY 2007-2008

(Premised on Retaining 4 cents Authorization)

1. Increase salary schedules 3% with 1% additional for Teacher Incentive Pay/with contingency for 4% increase for salary schedules with 1% for Teacher Incentive Pay. (See #17)
2. Health Insurance Funding (1.5%) ($5,900,000)
3. Increase Bilingual Stipend to $2500 ($335,000)
4. Fund Art, Music and P.E. at 7.5 staffing level (30.5 FTE/$1,442,711)
5. Dedicate 3 cents of 4 cents to employee compensation in FY 07-08
6. Dedicate 1 cent of 4 cents to fund (a) Teacher Compensation Plan (as recommended by the Teacher Compensation and Support Committee and the Administration) and (b) an Administrator Compensation Plan (as recommended by the Superintendent) in FY 07-08
7. Support Association and the Administration collectively designing a plan with the Teacher Compensation and Support Committee during 2006-2007 to apply for state teacher incentive funding for 2007-2008; the District could receive approximately

$6,000,000; if the plan is approved all salary schedules will be improved to 4% with 1% additional for Teacher Incentive Pay funded by the state.

8. No new financial proposals will be considered during 2007-2008

Notes:

A. Hill ISD and Association will make the above recommendations to the Board of Trustees for their consideration, realizing that the Board of Trustees is ultimately empowered to address Consultation Agreements

B. Hill ISD is considering no M & O tax increase in FY 2007-2008.

C. Hill ISD is considering an I & S (Bond) Referendum in November 2007.

* Hill ISD agrees to increase New Teacher Academy daily rate to $90.00 per day for August 2006 training; this will require $160,000 budget amendment for FY 2005-2006 (probably at the August 28, 2006 Board Meeting).

Appendix E: Hill ISD Performance Pay Program Schools Selection Criteria

1. *Academic Performance:* While schools currently identified as under-performing will be a target group for the pilot, academically higher achieving campuses will also be included. This will be particularly important in the area of establishing learning objectives and rewarding gains in student growth over time.

2. *Teacher Retention/Turnover:* Currently the average district-wide attrition rate of teachers is 14 percent, however at some campuses, this rate is as high as 40 percent annually. Campuses with varying turnover rates will be a particular focus for inclusion in the pilot.

3. *Established Campus Leadership:* The average attrition rate of principals in AISD is currently 20 percent, with significantly higher rates at some campuses. While this is an indicator the Strategic Compensation Initiative is aimed at affecting, for the purposes of the pilot, schools with stable leadership will be sought, given the need for the principal to be a key facilitator in the implementation of pilot program elements.

4. *Student Demographics:* Each year, the AISD student body becomes more racially and ethnically diverse while also coming from increasingly poor households. Campuses with large populations of English Language Learners, Special Education students, and students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, will be a particular focus of piloting in 2007-2008.

5. *Additional Considerations:*
   - Campuses in which full implementation of pilot program elements is most assured;
   - The number of campuses invited to participate will be determined by the district's capacity to properly support and evaluate the program elements being piloted.

Appendix F: Hill ISD Performance Pay Program Goals Statement

Because effective teaching and school leadership are essential to improving student learning; and

Because research shows that teacher quality is the most critical school factor in determining the
academic success of children; and

Because the leadership that school principals provide is directly related to both teacher and student performance; and

Because our community depends on a highly effective school system:

The Hill Independent School District has launched a performance-based compensation initiative aimed at ***Raising*** student achievement by ***Recruiting***, ***Retaining***, and ***Recognizing*** outstanding classroom teachers and principals. Through this initiative, Hill ISD will explore how new and enhanced forms of compensation and organizational support can:

- Improve student learning at all schools and for all students, and eliminate the achievement gap;
- Recruit well-qualified teachers and principals to all Hill ISD schools;
- Increase retention rates among Hill ISD teachers and principals;
- Strengthen the knowledge and skills of staff.

Appendix G: Student Learning Objectives Guidelines

Teacher Name/ID: _____ Is this a revision? _____ If yes, see Revision Form.

Student Learning Objective:

Ongoing Teacher Needs Assessment and Strategy Plan

Strategies to be Used What strategies will be implemented to accomplish the SLO?	**Teacher Professional Development to Support SLO** What learning opportunities will help you meet your SLO?	**Teacher Resources to support SLO** What are the material or human capital needs?
Criteria:		
■ Aligned with TEKS ■ Aligned with Principles of Learning ■ Follow research-based best practices ■ Address content area(s) and student group(s) targeted by SLO ■ Are relevant to students ■ Include ongoing reflexive practice	■ Related to content area(s) or student group(s) targeted by SLO	■ Related to content area(s) or student group(s) targeted by SLO
Questions to be answered:		
What strategies will you use to address the SLO? How and when will you monitor progress towards the SLO during the year? How and when will you involve your students, parents and community?	What learning opportunities could support this SLO? (i.e., What do you need to know?) How can your professional learning community support you? Is there a course offered at PDC (https://pdaecampus.austinisd.org/login.html) or elsewhere? Have you located a specific learning opportunity to address your need? If so, is the opportunity available soon enough to help you meet your goal?	What other resources would help you meet your SLO? Please explain why/how.

Note. Figure derived from document retrieved from Hill ISD website

Teacher Name/ID: _____ Is this a revision? _____ If yes, see Revision Form.

GUIDE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Academic CIP Goals:				
Needs Assessment/Rationale What are the needs?	**Learning Content/Context and Student Group** What and who is targeted?	**Learning Objective** What will students learn?	**Outcome Assessment** How will you know whether they learned it?	**Performance Target** What is your goal for student achievement?
Criteria:				
■ Campus data are reviewed for areas of strength and need (within subject area, within grade level, within student group, examining the Campus Improvement Plan (CIP), etc.) ■ Classroom data are reviewed for areas of strength and need (by subject area, by student group, by concepts/skills/behavior)	■ Targets specific academic concepts, skills, or behaviors based on TEKS ■ Targets the needs of the identified population ■ Considers demonstrated strengths of identified population, as well as classroom & school community ■ Targets year-long (or semester-long) concepts, skills, or behaviors ■ Supports goals of the Campus Improvement Plan (CIP)	■ Based on the identified student needs ■ Supports goals of the CIP ■ Is rigorous ■ Is a good example of ongoing, reflexive practice ■ Provides clear focus for instruction and assessment ■ Is measurable ■ Reflects strengths of students and school community	■ Aligns with the targeted learning content area ■ Relationship with learning objective is apparent ■ Has been demonstrated as reliable and valid for targeted students ■ Follows guidelines for appropriate assessments	■ Predicts performance based on past performance of students when available ■ Is a rigorous expectation for students ■ Is a rigorous expectation for teachers
Guiding questions:				
What **needs for all students** were identified? Based on what data? What **needs for student group(s)** were identified? What **strengths** were identified? Based on **what data**?	What general **content area(s)** is/are targeted? What is/are the targeted **TEKS Student Expectation(s)** (http://www.tea.state.tx.us/tks/index.html)? What **student group** is targeted? What are the **strengths** of the group and school community**?**	What is the **Student Learning Objective?** How is the SLO **based on student strengths and needs**? How is it **connected to TEKS/IPG**, (http://www.austinschools.org/matrix)? Does it **support CIP goals**?	**What assessment(s)** will be used to measure whether students met the objective? What **type of assessment** is it? (standardized, district-wide, teacher-made, etc.) **Why** is this the best assessment for your SLO?	What, if any, **baseline data** do you have? What is the **number/percentage** of students who will perform at the **target level**? What is the **performance target**? How was the **target** for the learning objective determined?

Note. Figure derived from document retrieved from Hill ISD website.

Student Learning Objective Examples Disseminated by District Program Office

Course/ Grade	Identified Student Needs	Rationale	Student Group	Student Learning Objective	Assessment	TEKS	Strategies	Instructional Needs
1st Grade Language Arts	Improve reading fluency	DRA pre-test showed 54% of students performed at level 1	1st grade class	75% of students will increase their fluency rates by 50% when reading with prosody.	Teacher-made Assessment	3.62	• Teach and model "Choosing the Just Right Book" • Guided fluency instruction • Cooperative Learning • Students graph progress	• What Really Matters Most for Struggling Readers • Training on creating reading fluent classrooms • Trade Books at student reading levels • Timers
4th Grade PE	Improve physical fitness skills	Students scored below national standard on President's Physical Fitness Test	All 4th Grade Students	75% of students will improve their baseline score by 40%tile points.	President's Physical Fitness Test	116.6 (1,2,4)	• Model proper fitness skills • Practice fitness skills • Play physical fitness games • Cooperative Learning	• Access to President's Physical Fitness Assessments • PE Equipment • Vocabulary Word Wall for test terms
5th Grade Science	Improve Science skills	54% of At-Risk students passed the pre-test for science, supports CIP for improving science skills	At-Risk Students in class	80% of At-Risk students will improve their score to 75% on the end of the year post-test.	Standardized Publishers Science Assessment Test	112.7	• Model multi-step problem solving • Guided science instruction • Science practice with real world applications • Focused science warm-ups • Students create science test questions	• Workshop on Science best practices • PDC: FOSS kits • Real world applications • Sample lessons
6th Grade Math	Improve Obj 4 on math	49% passing rate on Obj 4 of pre-test, Supports CIP for math goals	Students in 6th grade math	85% of students will use measurement in multi-step problems with a passing rate of 70% on objective 4.	Standardized Publishers Math Problem Solving Test	6.8	• Model multi-step problem solving • Guided math instruction • Measurement practice with real world applications • Focused math warm-ups	• PDC: Cognitively Guided Instruction • Real world applications for measurement ideas • Sample lessons for measurement • Workshop on best practices

Note. Figure derived from document retrieved from Hill ISD website.

Appendix H: Requirements for School Ratings in the Texas Accountability System

Table 6: Requirements for Each Rating Category

	Academically Acceptable	Recognized	Exemplary
Base Indicators			
TAKS (2009-10)* • All Students *and each student group meeting minimum size:* • African American • Hispanic • White • Econ. Disadvantaged ** TAKS (Accommodated) included for all grades and subjects.*	Meets each standard: • Reading/ELA ... **70%** • Writing ..... **70%** • Social Studies.. **70%** • Mathematics .... **60%** • Science..... **55%** **OR** Meets Required Improvement **OR** Meets standard with TPM	Meets **80%** standard for each subject **OR** Meets **75%** floor and Required Improvement **OR** Meets standard with TPM	Meets **90%** standard for each subject **OR** Meets standard with TPM
Completion Rate I (Class of 2009) *(if meets minimum size)* • All Students • African American • Hispanic • White • Econ. Disadvantaged	Meets **75.0%** standard **OR** Meets Required Improvement	Meets **85.0%** standard **OR** Meets floor of **75.0%** and Required Improvement	Meets **95.0%** standard
Annual Dropout Rate (2008-09) *(if meets minimum size)* • All Students • African American • Hispanic • White • Econ. Disadvantaged	Meets **1.8%** standard **OR** Meets Required Improvement	Meets **1.8%** standard **OR** Meets Required Improvement	Meets **1.8%** standard **OR** Meets Required Improvement
Additional Provisions			
Exceptions *(See Chapter 3 for more details.)*	May be applied if district/campus would be *Academically Unacceptable* due to not meeting *Academically Acceptable* criteria.	May be applied if district/campus would be *Academically Acceptable* due to not meeting *Recognized* criteria.	May be applied if district/campus would be *Recognized* due to not meeting *Exemplary* criteria.
Check for Academically Unacceptable Campuses (District only)	Does not apply to *Academically Acceptable* districts.	A district with a campus rated *Academically Unacceptable* cannot be rated *Recognized*.	A district with a campus rated *Academically Unacceptable* cannot be rated *Exemplary*.
Check for Underreported Students (District only)	Does not apply to *Academically Acceptable* districts.	A district that underreports more than **150** students or more than **4.0%** of its prior year students cannot be rated *Recognized*.	A district that underreports more than **150** students or more than **4.0%** of its prior year students cannot be rated *Exemplary*.

Source: *2010 Texas Accountability Manual*

Appendix I: McCoy Elementary and Thompson Elementary Student and Teacher Demographic Tables

Table I1. McCoy Elementary School Performance and Student Demographics

Year	Enrollment	Accountability Rating	Reading Comparable Improvement Quartile	Mathematics Comparable Improvement Quartile	% Economically Disadvantaged	% African American	% Hispanic	% White	% English Language Learners
2000	588	Academically Acceptable	4	1	50.9	4.9	53.2	40	25.3
2001	600	Academically Acceptable	4	4	60.3	4.3	58.5	35.3	31.0
2002	550	Academically Acceptable	2	3	64.4	4.9	62.2	30.2	37.6
2003	516	NA	NA	NA	62.4	8.5	62.2	27.9	34.7
2004	506	Academically Acceptable	NA	NA	68.4	6.7	64.8	27.3	32.6
2005	512	Academically Acceptable	4	3	72.1	5.9	65.6	27.5	33.4
2006	477	Academically Acceptable	3	3	73.4	5.2	71.3	22.9	36.1
2007	437	Academically Acceptable	3	4	75.3	3.9	78.7	15.3	45.8
2008	435	Academically Acceptable	4	4	75.4	3.9	79.1	14.5	48.3
2009	443	Recognized	4	3	79.2	2.9	80.6	13.3	51.7

Table I2. McCoy Elementary Teacher Experience

Year	# Teacher FTEs	% Beginning Teacher FTEs	% Teacher FTEs 1-5 Years Experience	% Teacher FTEs 6-10 Years Experience	% Teacher FTEs 11-20 Years Experience	% Teacher FTEs > 20 Years Experience	Average Teacher Salary
2000	40.4	7.4	12.4	18.4	29.7	32.2	$41,152
2001	38.6	0.0	13.8	18.1	28.5	39.6	$42,098
2002	38.2	2.6	9.8	14.4	30.1	43.2	$44,230
2003	39.8	2.3	7.5	20.1	27.3	42.7	$44,249
2004	38.3	2.6	12.8	17.0	28.4	39.2	$43,647
2005	39.2	0.0	10.2	18.4	26.8	44.6	$44,511
2006	39.0	2.6	10.3	12.8	29.5	44.9	$43,949
2007	36.8	5.0	8.1	13.6	28.5	44.8	$47,122
2008	37.0	0	10.8	13.5	29.7	45.9	$48,689
2009	38.0	5.3	15.8	7.9	28.9	42.1	$48,118

Table I3. Thompson Elementary School Performance and Student Demographics

Year	Enrollment	Accountability Rating	Reading Comparable Improvement Quartile	Mathematics Comparable Improvement Quartile	% Economically Disadvantaged	% African American	% Hispanic	% White	% English Language Learners
2000	901	Academically Acceptable	3	2	83.6	20.9	75	3.7	52.8
2001	937	Academically Acceptable	4	2	86	19.5	75.9	3.7	56.2
2002	628	Academically Acceptable	1	1	88.1	17	77.7	4.9	58.1
2003	594	NA	NA	NA	95.1	17	80.1	2.4	58.4
2004	552	Academically Unacceptable	NA	NA	94.4	15.9	79.5	2.9	58.9
2005	592	Academically Acceptable	2	2	96.5	19.8	76.2	2.5	59.6
2006	688	Recognized	1	2	97.8	18.3	78.6	2.5	62.9
2007	708	Academically Acceptable	1	2	96.5	15	81.8	2.7	65.8
2008	693	Academically Acceptable	3	3	97.8	12.0	85.7	1.9	73.2
2009	710	Academically Acceptable	2	4	96.9	11.5	86.3	1.8	73.2

Table I4. Thompson Elementary Teacher Experience

Year	# Teacher FTEs	% Beginning Teacher FTEs	% Teacher FTEs 1-5 Years Experience	% Teacher FTEs 6-10 Years Experience	% Teacher FTEs 11-20 Years Experience	% Teacher FTEs > 20 Years Experience	Average Teacher Salary
2000	54	10.9	44.3	16.7	18.9	9.3	$34,797
2001	56.7	13.9	42.4	17.6	20.8	5.3	$35,193
2002	42	9.6	42.8	14.3	21.4	11.9	$37,627
2003	44.9	4.4	47.2	15.3	19.6	13.5	$38,553
2004	43.1	15.7	33.7	20.4	18.6	11.6	$37,339
2005	43.4	27.6	34.5		9.2	12.5	$37,455
2006	40.5	9.2	58.7	14.8	7.4	9.9	$37,983
2007	45.7	10.7	49.3	19.7	8.8	11.6	$41,362
2008	43.9	4.3	59.2	18.2	6.8	11.4	$42,478
2009	46.0	6.5	54.3	23.9	4.3	10.9	$42,240

Appendix J: Thompson Elementary Texas Educator Excellence Grants (TEEG) Plans

Table J1. 2007-2008 TEEG Plan

$100,000 grant
45 teachers

Grade	Goal Content	Goal Target	Award Amount
PK-2	*Part I Performance*: PK: Reading/Vocabulary Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test or local benchmark K-2: end of year benchmark	PK: Class passing rates K: % attaining defined level 1-2: % meeting level or defined average gain	$2,000
3-5	*Part I Performance*: Reading & Math TAKS combined	Passing rate (Same rates for each grade)	$2,500
Special Ed	*Part I Performance*: SDAA or ARD	Passing rate	$2,500
All	*Part I Collaboration/ Professionalism*: Attendance at faculty and grade team meetings and campus professional development	Attendance rate	$1,000
Administrators and other instructional staff	*Part II*: Attendance at staff and grade team meetings and campus professional development	Attendance rate	Principal, AP, Counselor, Coaches, Librarian, special areas teachers (music, art, PE): $1,000 Custodial & Cafeteria staff: $200

Contingency Plan: Increase Part I award amounts if fewer teachers than anticipated meet goals. Part II contingency not specified.

Table J2. Thompson Elementary 2008-2009 TEEG Plan

$120,000 grant
40 teachers

Grade	Goal Content	Goal Target	Award Amount
PK-2	*Part I Performance*: PK: Reading/Vocabulary Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test or local benchmark K-2: DRA	PK: Class passing rates K: % attaining defined level 1-2: % meeting level or defined average gain	$2,000
3-5	*Part I Performance*: Reading & Math TAKS combined	Passing rate or increase in % passing from previous year Same rates for each grade	$2,000: grade 3 $2,500: grades 4 & 5
Special Ed	*Part I Performance*: IEPs	% students meeting goals	$2,000
All	*Part I Collaboration/ Professionalism*: Attendance at faculty and grade team meetings and campus PD	Attendance rate	$500
Administrators and other instructional staff	*Part II*: Attendance at faculty and grade team meetings and campus PD	Attendance rate	Principal & AP: $1,000 Counselor & Coaches: $1,500 Librarian & special areas teachers (music, art, PE): $1,000 Teacher aides: $500

Contingency Plan: Increase Part I award amounts if fewer teachers than anticipated meet goals. Increase Part II award amounts for Part II staff if fewer staff than anticipated meet goals.

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Notes

[1] See http://www.tapsystem.org/action/action.taf?page=faq.

[2] TAP was launched five years before ProComp, but was, until recently, limited to a small number of schools nationwide. ProComp was the first diversified performance pay plan to be implemented in a large school district, and, arguably, generated much of the interest in performance pay seen today.

[3] The Institute of Education Sciences (IES), for example, refers frequently to fidelity as the singular measure of implementation in its descriptions of research goals and requirements for grant proposals. IES has also offered training for grant recipients on measuring and accounting for implementation that focuses solely on measures of fidelity and statistical models to control for variations in fidelity. See http://ies.ed.gov/.

[4] Another commonly used approach to qualitative inquiry is critical research. In this type of inquiry, educational phenomena are examined in relation to power and social and cultural reproduction (Merriam, 1998).

[5] This teacher appraisal system was replaced in 1997 by the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS).

[6] The Texas Legislature meets in regular sessions every other year, in odd-numbered years (e.g., 2007, 2009). The Governor may call special sessions between regular sessions to address specific issues. There is no limit on the number of special sessions that may be called, although each is limited to 30 days. Committees of both houses of the Legislature meet and hold hearings during off years (known as interim years) to prepare recommendations on specific issues for the upcoming regular session.

[7] This section is drawn from a number of publicly available sources, including state student demographic and performance data, evaluation reports, Board of Trustees meeting materials and minutes, the Hill ISD website, and a book about reforms in Hill ISD. In the interest of confidentiality and anonymity, these sources are not identified here.

[8] Enrollment of African American students decreased by almost one-third during this same period. Between 2000 and 2009, African American enrollment made up 12%-17% of total enrollment each year.

[9] Specifically, property-rich districts must return to the state 40 cents for every dollar of tax revenue earned above a specified amount ($1.06 per $100 of property value) or engage in other means of reducing overall property revenue, such as consolidating with a neighboring property-poor district. For the 2009-2010 school year, 208 districts (about 17% of all districts) were classified as property-rich; almost all participated in the recapture process. These funds are distributed among property-poor districts.

[10] Texas labor laws prohibit collective bargaining by unions. However, most school districts in the state maintain consultation agreements with professional associations pertaining to district policy matters. Professional associations differ in their influence depending on their size and affiliation with state and national organizations. The association in Hill ISD represents teachers, school administrators and other school employees and is considered one of the more influential associations in the state.

[11] This information was obtained from an evaluation of Hill ISD's performance pay program published by the district. To maintain anonymity, this publication is not identified.

[12] Comparable Improvement is a growth-type measure included in AEIS. The Texas Growth Index (TGI) is calculated for each school based on TAKS Reading and Math scores. The TGI is derived by comparing changes in scores from one year to the next to expected changes based on student demographics and prior scores. TGI scores for each school are then compared to a set of 40 comparison schools with similar student demographics, and are presented in quartiles. Q1 is the top quartile, Q2 is the second quartile, and so on. Comparable Improvement is not used to rate schools for accountability purposes.

[13] These were not the only processes in which teachers, school administrators, and district administrators engaged. The mentoring and professional development components, in particular, also carried with them new requirements and activities, and went through changes as the program progressed. However, these components did not emerge as activities that had great impact on most of the individuals interviewed for this study. Additionally, other changes to the program, such as the creation of Higher Needs schools, did not emerge as important events in most individuals' sensemaking of the program.

[14] An evaluation of outcomes in the first year subsequently found that 27% of student learning objectives had to be revised. Only 7% of these revisions were due to lack of rigor or use of inadequate assessments. The largest percentage (38%) was due to teachers not requiring that at least 75% of all students meet the objective, as specified in program rules (see note 10).

[15] Focus group respondents were not identified individually in transcripts and are not labeled consistently. So, Administrator 1 in one set of quotes may or may not be the same individual as Administrator 1 in another set of quotes.

[16] Activities and evaluations for Take One!® were conducted by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Mentors were trained in new teacher development by the New Teacher Center at the University of California at Santa Cruz. Program staff in Hill ISD coordinated teacher groups for Take One!®. They also recruited, placed, and evaluated mentor teachers.

[17] The mentoring component was described by all school participants as very valuable for beginning teachers, though the interviewees (for the most part) had little else to say about it. More experienced teachers often commented that they wished they could have or had had similar support. Teachers whose experience fell just outside the range for beginning teachers in the program (those with four or five years of teaching) particularly emphasized the value that mentoring could add to their teaching. Only one teacher in the study had participated in Take One!®. Similar to reports from other teachers in the district, she reported that the program had been time-consuming and that she felt she had not gained much professional learning from the experience (it should be noted that she did not earn a passing score on the portfolio she submitted to NBPTS as the product of her participation).

[18] This school classification may have been created, in part, to improve responses to the program by teachers at non-highest needs schools. Evaluations after the second year of the program found that teachers in those schools were less satisfied with the program than teachers at Highest Needs schools. Fewer than half of teachers in non-highest needs schools reported that they would continue to participate in the program, given the choice, compared to more than three-quarters of teachers in Highest Needs schools (see note 10).

[19] Hill ISD provided this information in response to a public information request made by the newspaper.

[20] The statute authorizing DATE states that “an eligible campus *must* (emphasis added) use 60% of a grant award received under 21.704 to provide incentive payments to classroom teachers assigned to the campus,” ("Texas Education Code," 2006) Further, the Education Commissioner’s rules for the program, contained in the Texas Administrative Code, specify that these funds “may be used only for classroom teachers and principals that positively impact student academic improvement and/or growth” ("Texas Administrative Code," 2008) Thus, schools are required to distribute 60% of their grant awards to teachers who meet performance goals for student growth. Since some teachers may fail to meet one or both of those goals, any excess funds must be redistributed to teachers who did meet both goals. This requirement is described in the program guidelines. A description of the school’s contingency plan is required in DATE grant applications.

[21] Students are considered mobile if they miss six or more weeks at a particular school during the school year.

[22] The statute authorizing TEEG states that “an eligible campus must (emphasis added) use 75% of a grant award received under Section 21.655 to provide incentive payments to classroom teachers assigned to the campus,” ("Texas Education Code," 2006) Further, the Education Commissioner’s rules for the program, contained in the Texas Administrative Code, specify that “an eligible campus receiving program funds may distribute an incentive payment only (emphasis added) to a classroom teacher who: (A) demonstrates success in improving student achievement. Measures determining a classroom teacher's success in improving student performance must allow for program administrators to evaluate teacher impact on student achievement; and (emphasis added) (B) successfully collaborates with faculty and staff to contribute to improving overall student performance on the campus. The collaboration must be measured using campus-based activities. Participation in tutoring sessions or personal-planning periods is not a sufficient measure of collaboration,” ("Texas Administrative Code," 2006) Thus, schools are required to distribute 75% of their grant awards to teachers who meet performance goals for both student achievement and collaboration. Since some teachers may fail to meet one or both of those goals, any excess funds must be redistributed to teachers who did meet both goals. This requirement is described in the program guidelines. A description of the school’s contingency plan is required in TEEG grant applications.